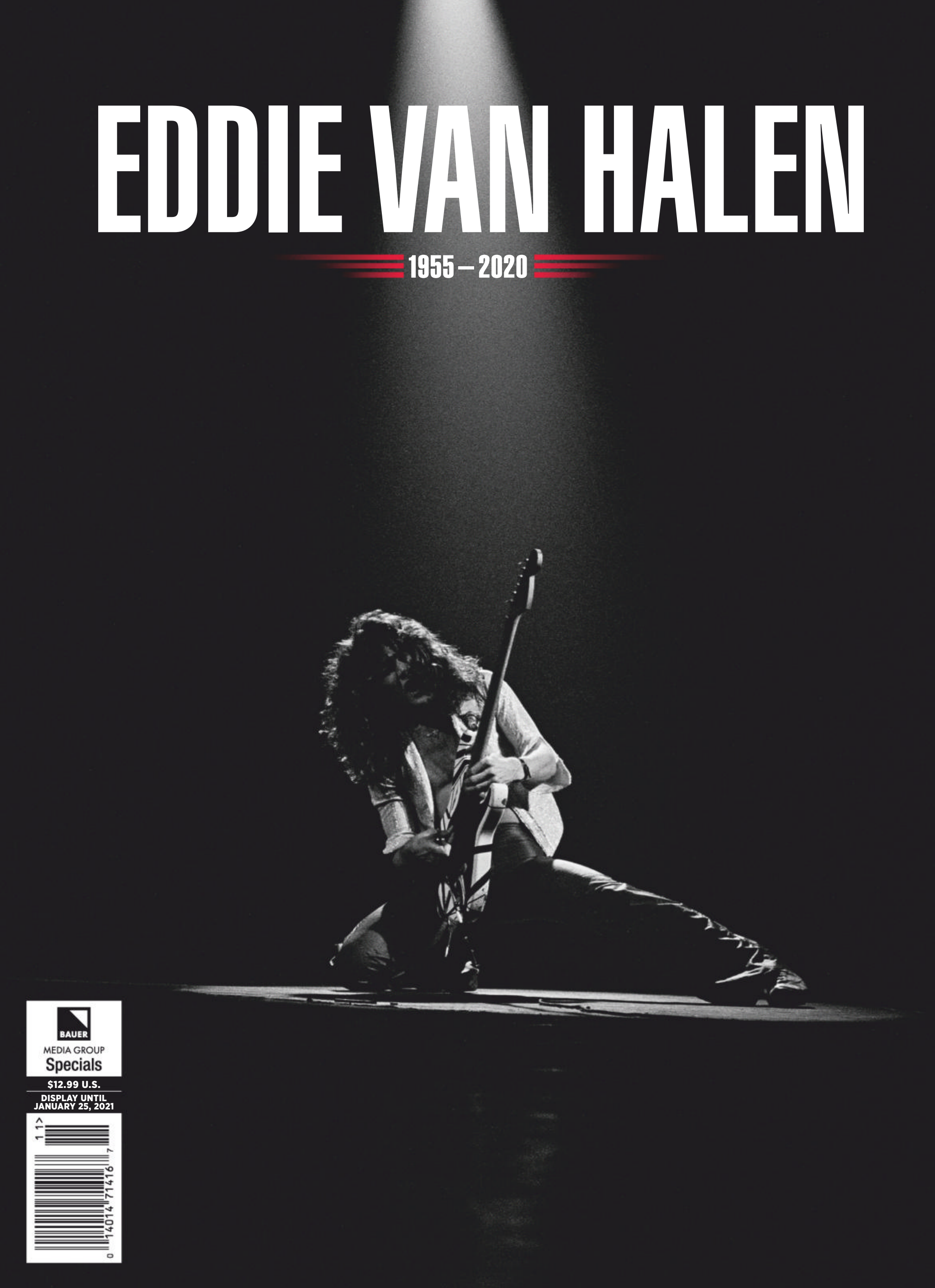
# EDDIE VAN HALEN

1955 – 2020



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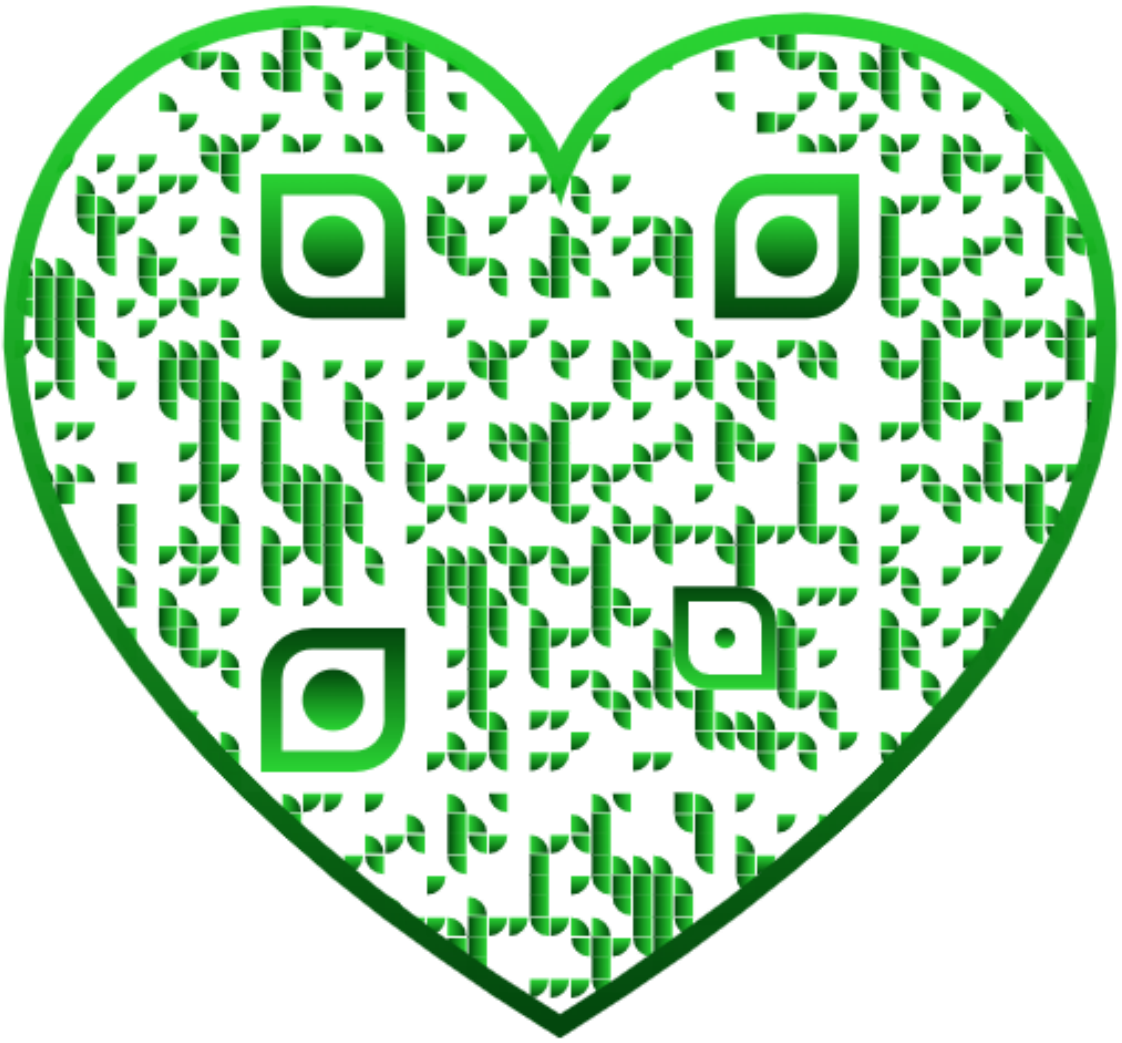

# EDDIE VAN HALEN

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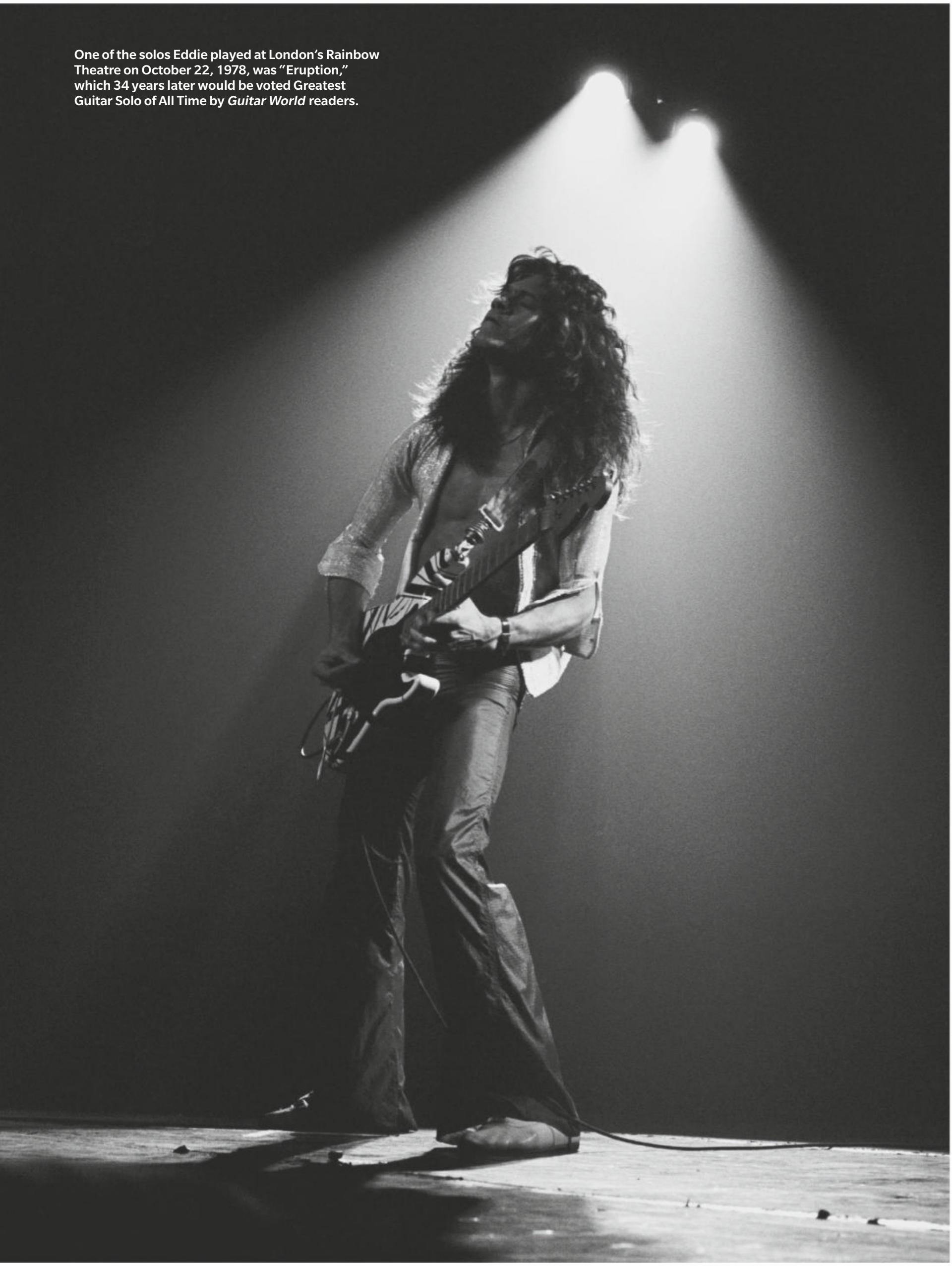
INTRODUCTION

# WHY WE LOVE EDDIE VAN HALEN



One of the solos Eddie played at London's Rainbow Theatre on October 22, 1978, was "Eruption," which 34 years later would be voted Greatest Guitar Solo of All Time by *Guitar World* readers.

On October 6, 2020, less than a month after the revival of the electric guitar was celebrated in *The New York Times,* Eddie Van Halen died of throat cancer at the age of 65. As the engine behind the namesake band, Van Halen, Eddie was the guitar world's most prominent figure for nearly half a century. He was a spirited innovator who revolutionized the way guitar was played, the way guitars, amps and effects were designed, and the way rock bands dressed and behaved for the MTV generation.

From Van Halen's 1978 self-titled debut album to the band's final studio release, 2012's *A Different Kind of Truth,* Eddie reinvented relentlessly. He came up with playing techniques that dazzled while never failing to serve the music it supported. His visionary approach to gear led to numerous innovations.

If you were around in the 1980s and '90s, you didn't need to be a fan of Eddie Van Halen's music to feel his enormous impact. The top acts from pop, rock, metal and even country were inspired by Eddie's forward-thinking approach to everything he touched. "I hate to bring up *Spinal Tap,*" he said in a Zócalo Public Square video, "but while they were going to 11 at that time, I was already going to 15. I was already way past that."

As a guitarist, songwriter and producer, Eddie's music reflected an open-mindedness and willingness to take risks that is rarely seen in successful musicians. Those that have "made it" often err on the side of caution to keep their brand safe. But not Eddie, even when that meant playing clean slide guitar or cranking something as unlikely as a Wurlitzer electric piano through a Marshall stack (while also adding a heaping dose of flanger effect) on a hard-rock record. If that's what he wanted to do then that's what he did, no matter how unconventional. Eddie Van Halen never backed down.

Eddie's vision would pay off time and time again. When he was criticized for introducing keyboards in "And the Cradle Will Rock..." on *Women and Children First,* he didn't budge. Several albums later, the keyboard-driven "Jump" became Van Halen's biggest hit. And while hardcore loyalists might have mocked his guest appearance on Michael Jackson's "Beat It," it helped *Thriller* become the best-selling album of all time.

We watched Eddie take on the ups and downs. His marriage to (and, later, divorce from) TV sweetheart Valerie Bertinelli, his concert grin that made it seem as if there's nothing greater than being a rock star, his battle with drug and alcohol addiction, and, ultimately, the bout with cancer that led to his death. Through the good and the bad, Eddie's philosophy was simple and succinct. "Keep playin', man," he said. "You gotta keep playin'."

With wife Valerie Bertinelli by his side, Eddie appeared publicly with David Lee Roth in 1985 for one of the final times before Roth's departure from Van Halen later that year.

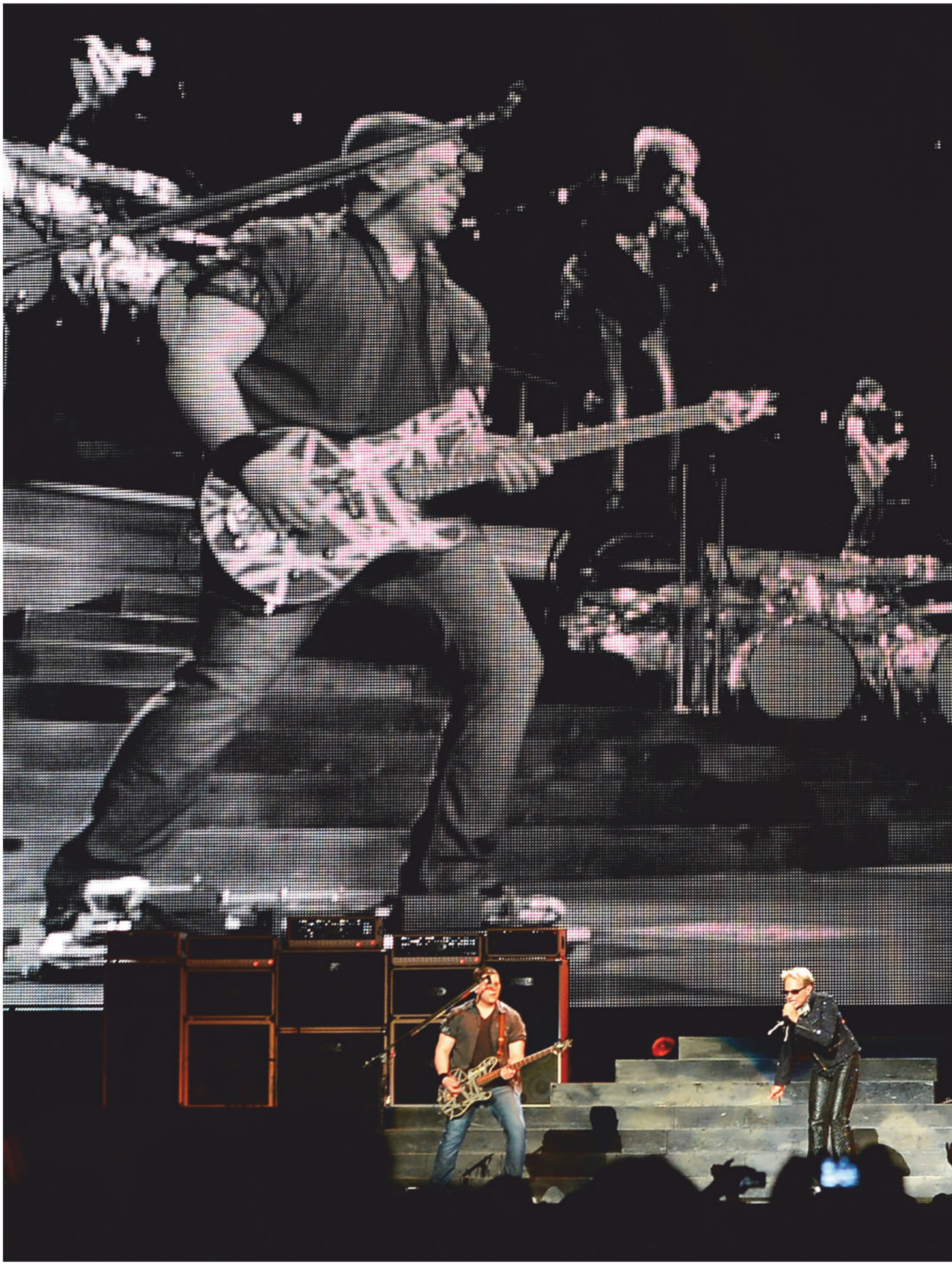
A May 1995 announcement that Eddie would need to undergo hip replacement surgery cited the reason as wear and tear of jumping around concert stages all over the world. "It's like any other type of athlete who overuses a part of his anatomy," bassist Michael Anthony told Ontario's *Hamilton Spectator* at the time. "But Eddie's only been sober now for about 10 months, and when he was drunk he didn't realize his hip had been bothering him. When he felt a constant pain, he got it diagnosed."

**"It's nice, but sometimes it's like, 'C'mon, I'm just a punk kid who plays guitar," Eddie responded to a 1988 MTV question about being referred to as a guitar hero. When then asked whether he ever surprised himself when he was playing, Eddie responded, "Oh yeah! Sometimes I freak myself out."**

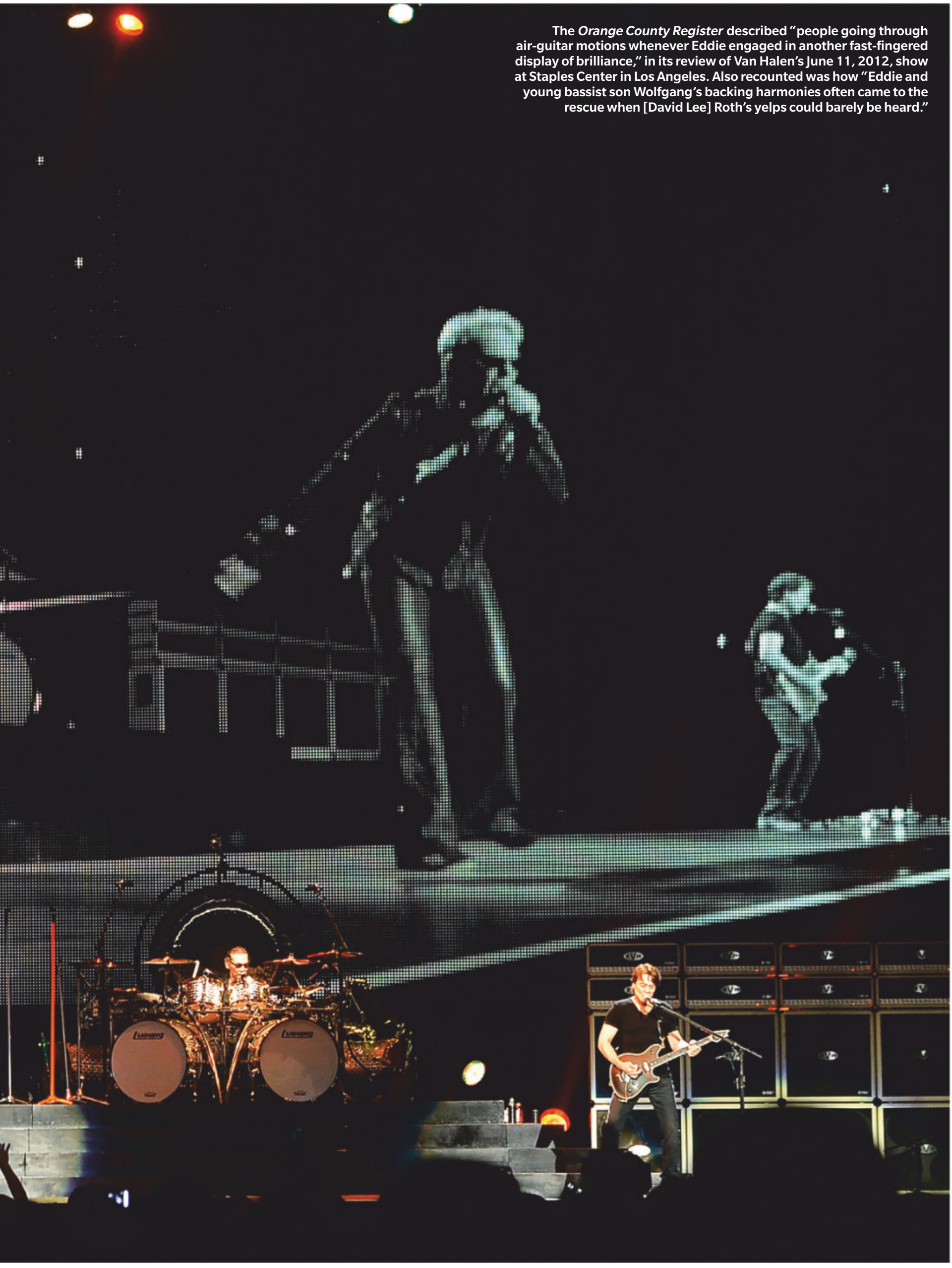
5150

**On their first trip to London, Van Halen performed at the Lewisham Odeon on May 27, 1978. A little more than three months earlier, *Billboard* wrote in a review of the band's self-titled debut album, "This quartet plays some of the most intense rock 'n' roll you'll hear. Its fiery brand of bar room, small club loud driving rock contains some blistering guitar riffs by Edward Van Halen along with the powerful bass riffs of Anthony. Roth's vocals never quit."**

**"I was very confident in myself," Sammy Hagar (below, in dark blue) said to *Rock Candy,* reflecting on joining Van Halen as David Lee Roth's replacement. "Eddie would say, 'Can you hit this note?' I'd hit it and everybody would go, 'Wow!'. What I did was inspire Eddie to go, 'Oh, I can do this and I can do that. I've got this musical idea that I would never show Roth. But with Sammy, I can play it.'"**

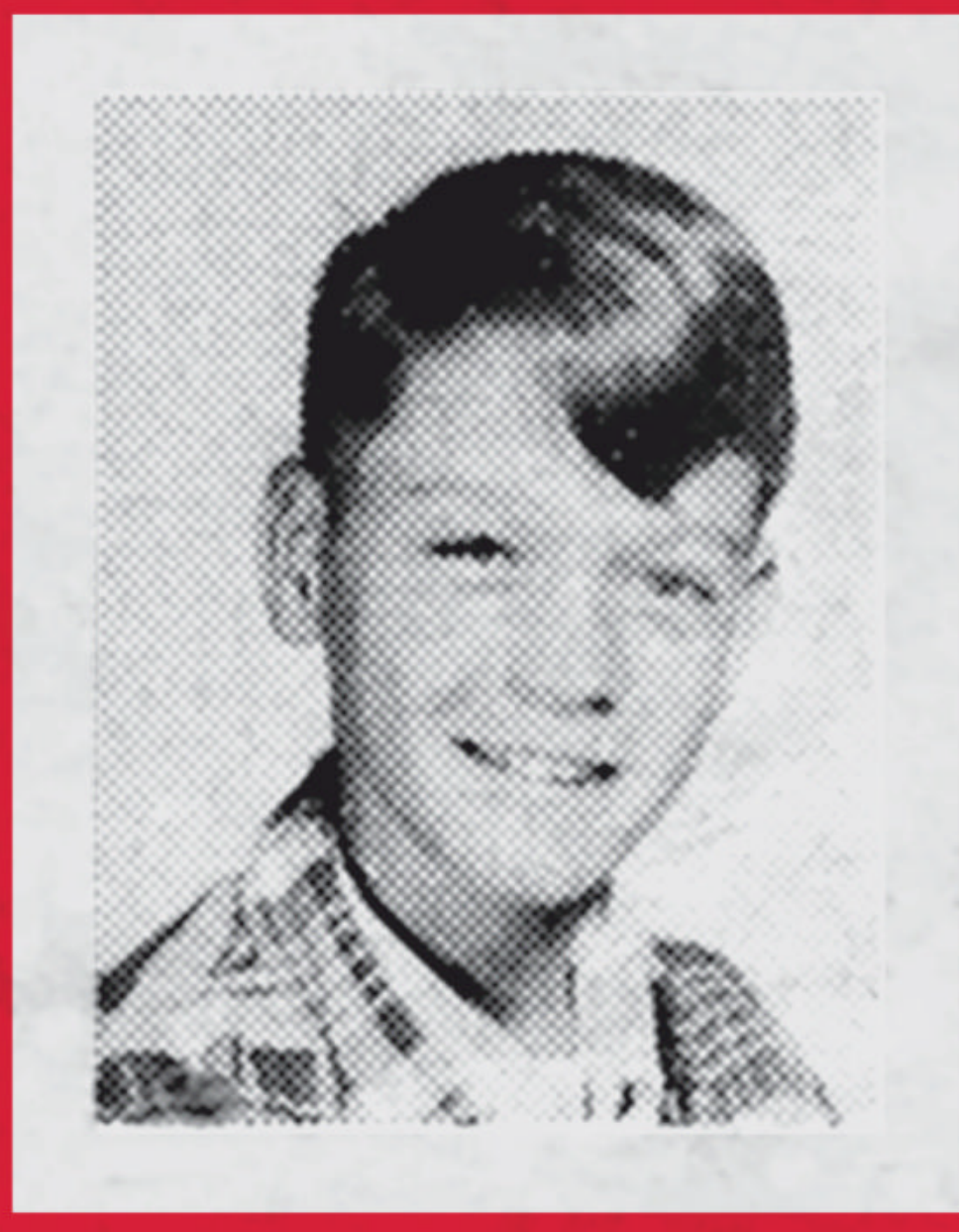


The *Orange County Register* described "people going through air-guitar motions whenever Eddie engaged in another fast-fingered display of brilliance," in its review of Van Halen's June 11, 2012, show at Staples Center in Los Angeles. Also recounted was how "Eddie and young bassist son Wolfgang's backing harmonies often came to the rescue when [David Lee] Roth's yelps could barely be heard."

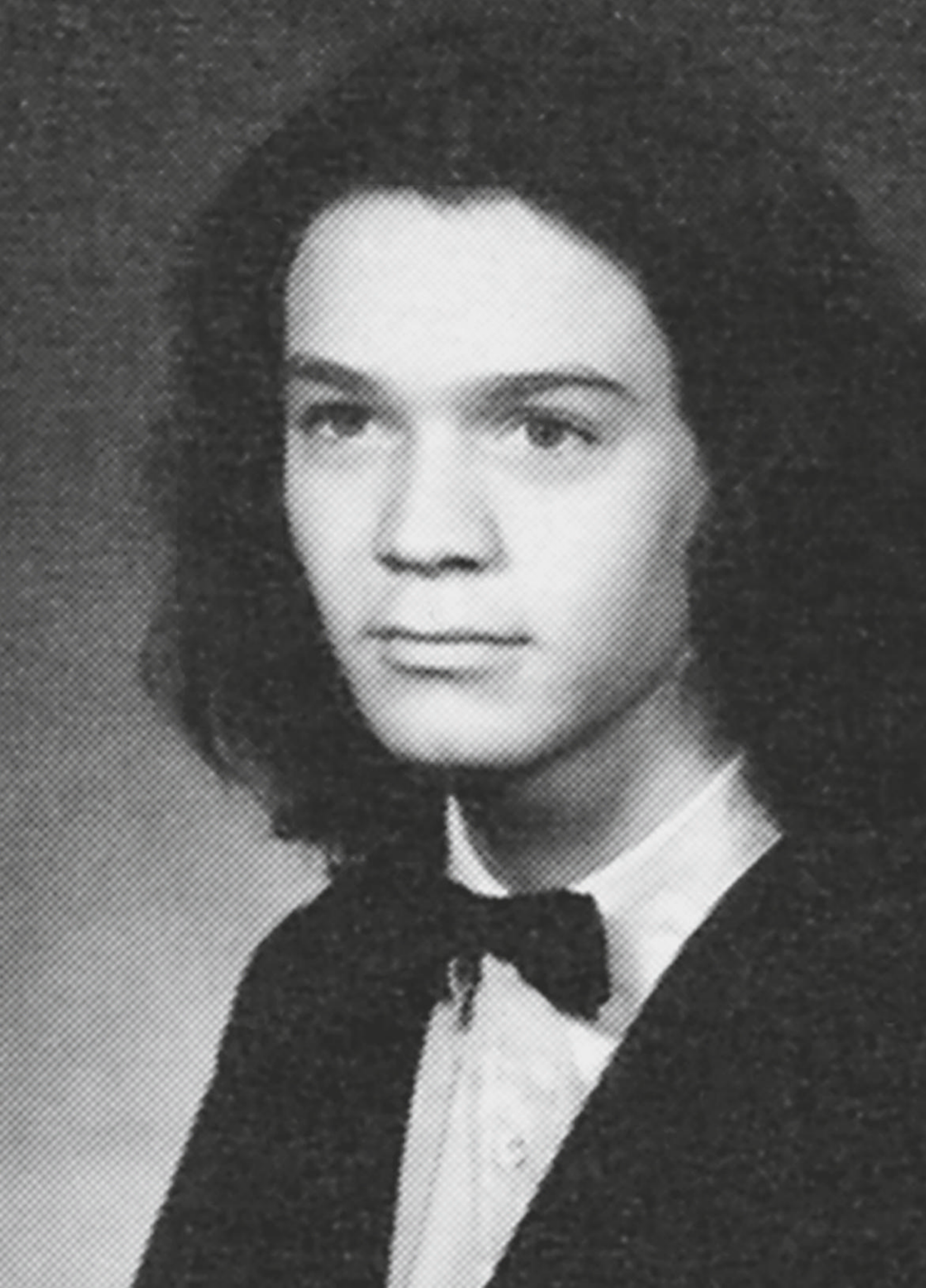


CHAPTER 1

# THE BEGINNING



Shown here in a photo taken when he was in seventh grade, Eddie took on a paper route to pay for a $125 St. George drum set. His brother, Alex, was taking guitar lessons but would play the drums while Eddie was delivering newspapers. Eddie realized Alex was better than him at drums, so they swapped instruments.



Eddie, shown here in his senior photo from the 1973 Pasadena High School Yearbook, filled both guitar and lead vocal duties for the band he and his brother, Alex, formed with bassist Mark Stone in 1972. Initially called Genesis, the band was later renamed Mammoth after they discovered that the Genesis name had already been claimed.

dward Lodewijk Van Halen was born on January 6, 1955, in the city of Nijmegen in the Netherlands' province of Gelderland. Lodewijk is a Dutch translation of Ludwig—as in Ludwig Van Beethoven—so Eddie had a legendary music connection right from birth. Nobody, however, could have predicted that Eddie Van Halen would go on to revolutionize the music world.

Eddie's father, Jan Van Halen, was a Dutch jazz musician with classical training in clarinet and saxophone. While on tour in Indonesia, Jan met Eugenia van Beers, an Indonesian–Dutch woman, and they married and eventually moved to Europre. When gigs began drying up for Jan, the family—which included oldest son Alex and Eddie—decided it was time to pack up and head to America.

On the boat, Jan performed to pay his family's way. Young Eddie and Alex played piano during intermissions. The family was invited to dine at the captain's table one night, and the Van Halen boys had their first lesson in the perks of being performers.

After nine long days at sea, the Van Halens arrived in New York. From there, they boarded a train to California, where they found a permanent home at 1881 Las Lunas Street in Pasadena, a house that was just under 900 square feet. They shared the house with two other families, and lived in one room, sleeping on one bed. It was the classic American immigrant story.

Things weren't so rosy in the beginning. Eddie and Alex mainly stuck to themselves during their early school years because they weren't particularly fluent in English. Jan worked odd jobs as a janitor for the Masonic Temple and as a dishwasher at the Arcadia Methodist Hospital, for which he walked three miles to get to work. Eugenia made money as a maid.

Eddie, shown here in a photo taken during his freshman year at Pasadena High School, became obsessed with Eric Clapton's lead guitar playing. He attended his first concert on November 21, 1970, which was Clapton's Derek and the Dominos at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium, after a friend won tickets from a local radio station.

VAN HALEN

## BY THE NUMBERS

# $4.50

cost of an orchestra seat to Eddie's first concert, Eric Clapton's Derek and the Dominos

Things slowly began to pick up. Jan found a circle of musicians and started gigging on the weekends. Alex played drums with Jan on the gigs, and Eddie was later added on bass. Music continued to be the driving force in the family, and Eddie soon started piano lessons with Stass Kalvitis, a very demanding elderly Russian teacher. Despite his father's training, Eddie didn't know how to read music, but he was able to emulate what he saw Kalvitis doing. Eddie didn't know it at the time, but his piano origins would later have a profound influence on the music of Van Halen. Between ages 9 and 11, he won numerous piano competitions including first prize in his category three times at Long Beach City College. At his final competition, Eddie placed second. The signs were clear to his parents: Eddie was losing interest in the competitive classical piano circuit.

It was the mid-1960s, and bands like The Beatles and The Dave Clark Five prompted Eddie to quit piano lessons and channel his musical energy elsewhere. Inspired by such songs as The DC5's "Glad All Over" and The Surfaris' "Wipe Out," Eddie took on a paper route to pay for a $125 St. George drum set. Meanwhile, Eugenia had Alex take flamenco guitar lessons. But guitar was not in Alex's DNA, and while Eddie was delivering newspapers, Alex was playing Eddie's drums. One day, Eddie realized that Alex was actually better than him at drums, so they decided to swap instruments.

At Pasadena's Hamilton Elementary School, the Van Halen brothers met another pair of musically talented siblings: Kevan and Brian Hill. This 1964 meeting led to the formation of Eddie and Alex's first band, the Broken Combs, which saw Eddie on piano, Alex on sax, Kevan Hill on guitar, Brian Hill on drums and Don Ferris also on saxophone. The Broken Combs had a two-year stint (long for elementary school kids) and performed original songs including "Boogie Booger" and "Rumpus" in the school cafeteria. Before disbanding, the band's name changed to The Trojan Rubber Company.

During this period, Eddie became obsessed with the guitar. He bought a four-pickup Teisco Del Rey guitar from Sears thinking that the more pickups a guitar had,

the better it was. After learning the basic major barre chord, Eddie began playing The Ventures' "Walk Don't Run," which took this chord shape and simply shifted it down the fretboard, starting on A and ending on an open E chord. Eddie loved the sounds of Led Zeppelin, and he later became obsessed with Eric Clapton's lead guitar playing. He spent countless hours learning every Clapton solo note-for-note. A friend won tickets from a local radio station to a concert of Clapton's Derek and the Dominos on November 21, 1970, at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium and gave them to the Van Halen brothers. This was Eddie's first concert, and although they had finagled sixth row seats (an upgrade from the original free tickets), Eddie still used a pair of binoculars to watch—he had to study Clapton's guitar action as closely as possible.

In 1972, the Van Halen brothers recruited bassist Mark Stone and formed Genesis, with Eddie filling both guitar and lead vocal duties. The band was renamed Mammoth once they discovered that the Genesis name had already been claimed by English prog-rockers. Mammoth became a fixture on the suburban keg-party scene. They considered themselves "a junior Cream," and performed a set of Cream covers, in addition to songs by Grand Funk Railroad, Deep Purple and Black Sabbath. Fate stepped in when Mammoth went up against the Red Ball Jets at a battle of the bands at Pasadena's Hamilton Park. A flashy kid named David Lee Roth was the singer for the Red Ball Jets and this meeting would soon change the face of rock music. Because Mammoth didn't actually own a PA system, they started renting Roth's PA for gigs. Eddie eventually stepped down as lead vocalist, and Roth joined the band, taking over lead vocals. Soon after Roth joined, things finally fell into place. At a Pasadena High School concert, their PA broke down. Michael Anthony (Sobolewski) was playing bass with Snake, another band on the same bill, and offered the use of his PA. Shortly after, bassist Stone got the boot, and Anthony came on board.

Mammoth eventually heard that another local band had the same name, so Roth suggested they name their band after the brothers with the fancy musical upbringing. Van Halen was born.

GUITAR GODS

# THE PLAYERS WHO INFLUENCED EDDIE

## ERIC CLAPTON

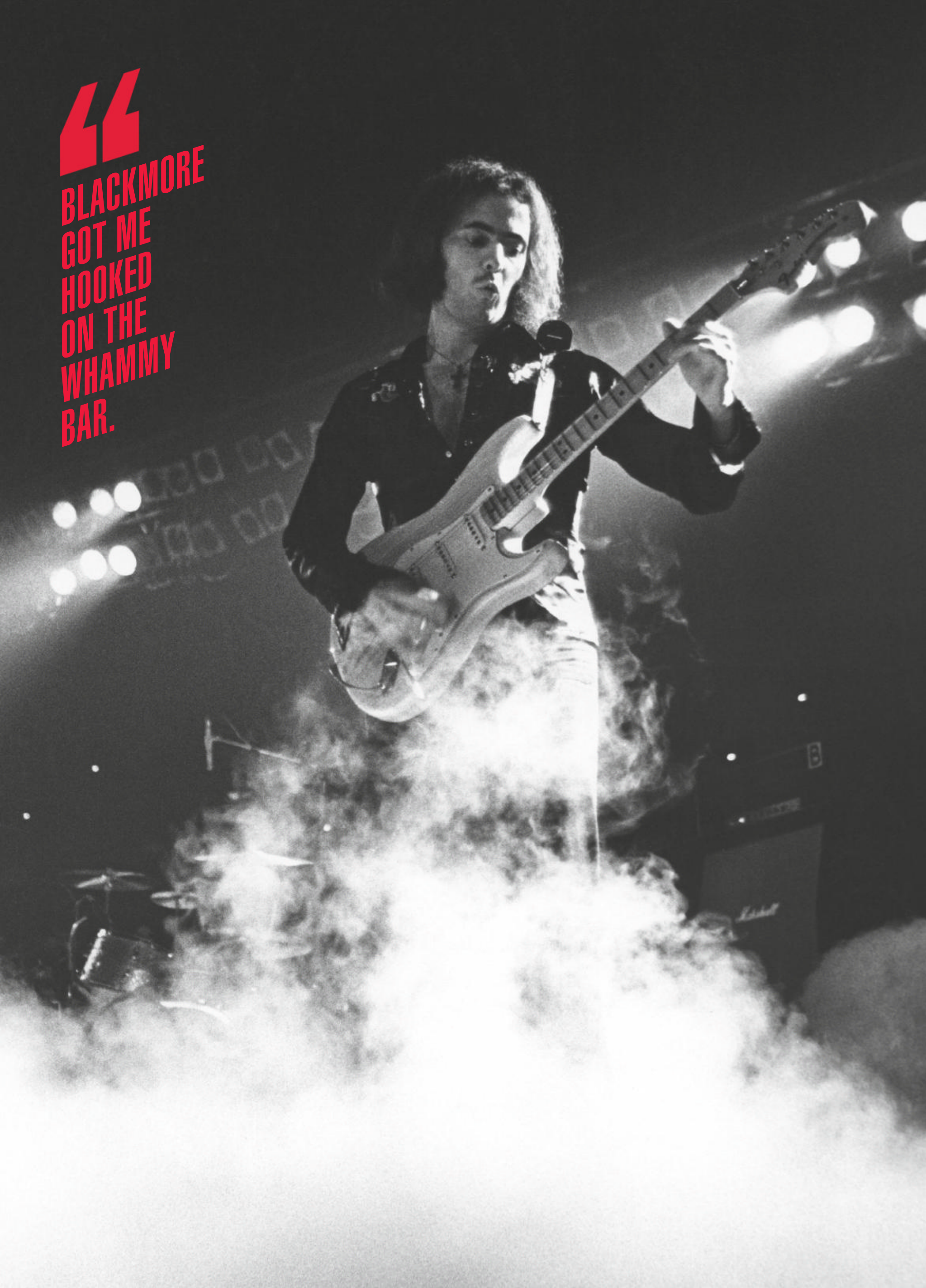
Eric Clapton was Eddie's first guitar influence, with his live Cream performances having the most significant impact. While Clapton's "Slowhand" sobriquet might seemingly be at odds with Eddie's flashy, high-octane style, Eddie was drawn to Clapton's playing. "With his feel, he'd hit one note where someone else would hit 20, and it would really do something to you," Eddie told *Guitar World* (January, 1981), "whereas another person's 20 would leave you flat." Eric Clapton's solos on "Crossroads" and "I'm So Glad," in particular, had a profound impact on Eddie. Of "I'm So Glad," Eddie told *Guitar World* (July, 1985), "For my mind, nothing has matched it to this day."

## STEVE LUKATHER

Session ace Steve Lukather, who has played guitar on a wide variety of pop albums, was allegedly referred to by Eddie as "the world's greatest guitar player." The two met in 1980 when Van Halen was recording *Women and Children First* and Lukather, en route to a tour, needed to borrow an amp. Eddie and Lukather recorded together on Michael Jackson's mega-hit "Beat It," with Eddie playing the famous solo and Lukather covering all of the other parts. The pair also did a one-off gig with several studio musicians under the moniker Phuxnot, where they covered Jimi Hendrix and Cream classics.

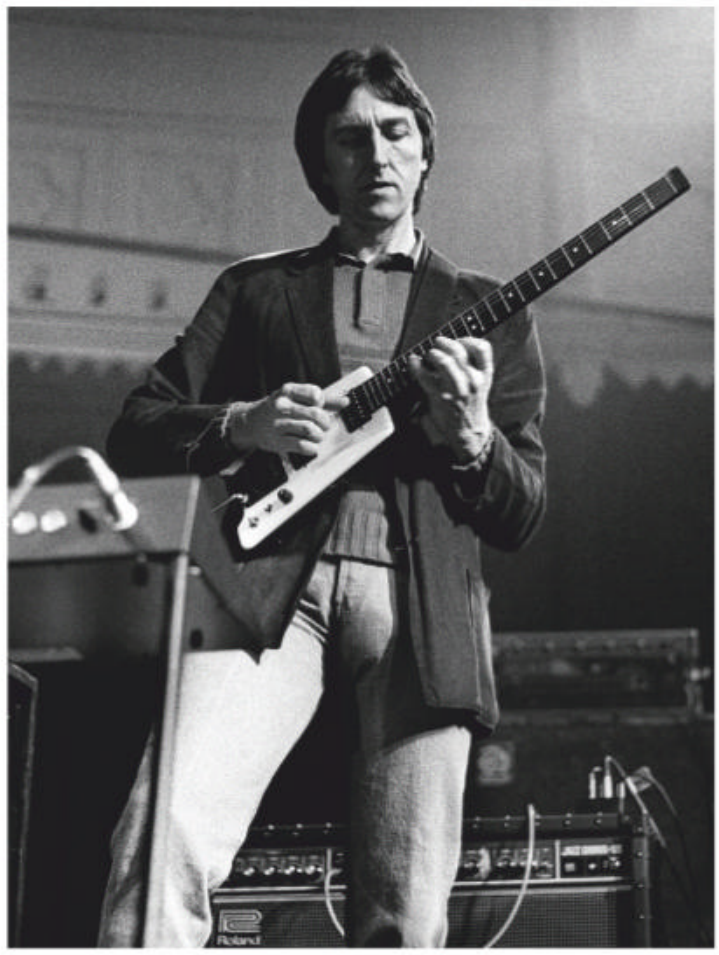
## JIMMY PAGE

Eric Clapton may have been Eddie's main guitar influence, but Eddie has credited Jimmy Page's reckless-abandon style as being closer in spirit to his own. Were it not for Page's solo in "Heartbreaker" at an August 21, 1971, Led Zeppelin concert at the Los Angeles Forum, Eddie's revolutionary tapping technique might not have seen the light of day. Eddie had an epiphany when he heard Page playing a left-hand-only figure that alternated against an open string. He envisioned a right-hand finger tapping one of the fretted notes, and subsequently allowing for a bigger stretch between notes than would otherwise be possible with only the fretting hand. Not all rock fans know the technique, but they know the distinctive sound it produces.


“
BLACKMORE GOT ME HOOKED ON THE WHAMMY BAR.

## RITCHIE BLACKMORE <

Ritchie Blackmore's use of the vibrato bar on the album *Deep Purple in Rock* inspired Eddie to explore using the bar as an expressive device. Whammy-bar flutters and divebombs became a hallmark of Eddie's sound and propelled the creation of the Floyd Rose double-locking tremolo system, which allowed the guitar to stay in tune even amidst extreme whammy-bar abuse. Eddie admired Blackmore's ability to write such killer riffs as the one in the timeless classic, "Smoke on the Water." Blackmore, in turn, has expressed admiration for Eddie, telling *Guitar World* (February, 1991), "He is probably the most influential player in the last 15 years."



## TONY IOMMI

Eddie grew up in the era when the riff was king, and he considered Black Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi to be the "master of the guitar riff." (Eddie has said that the riff to Sabbath's "Into the Void" ranks up there with Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.) In his formative years, Eddie took interest in Black Sabbath's music, singing and playing guitar on covers of nearly the entire Sabbath catalog. Eddie had even planned to name his band "Rat Salad," after the Sabbath song from the 1970 album *Paranoid*. In 1978, Van Halen and Black Sabbath toured together for eight months, and Eddie and Iommi consistently stayed up all night after shows discussing music.

## ALLAN HOLDSWORTH

Jazz fusion guitarist Allan Holdsworth's horn-like legato guitar stylings had a major impact on Eddie's playing. Eddie had referred to Holdsworth as "the best, in my book," and Holdsworth's influence can be heard on Eddie's solos on "And the Cradle Will Rock" and "Drop Dead Legs." Eddie was one of the first mainstream guitarists to bring Holdsworth's name into the limelight. He connected Holdsworth with producer Ted Templeman and secured a Warner Brothers record deal for Holdsworth's 1983 *Road Games* EP. For the solo Eddie did in Michael Jackson's "Beat It," he used a modified Hartley-Thompson amp he borrowed from Holdsworth.

CHAPTER 2

# BECOMING VAN HALEN

Pictured here in a stairwell at London's Lewisham Odeon on May 27, 1978, Van Halen played 39 shows in Europe in addition to two in Canada, nine in Japan and 124 in the United States in support of their self-titled debut album. The 10-month tour would end up being the band's most extensive.

Performing at The Palladium in New York City during the first month of their 1978 World Tour, Van Halen opened for Journey and Montrose, which was touring as an instrumental band following the 1975 departure of lead singer Sammy Hagar. "All I remember saying is that I was glad I was not following Eddie," Journey guitarist Neal Schon told the *Daily Herald* in 2012.

ots of kids in the late '60s and early '70s formed rock bands. Many of those bands took the next step and got to play some gigs. But few of those bands broke through.

When bassist Michael Anthony replaced Mark Stone, Van Halen began to separate from everyone else. Their sound was big and crowd-pleasing. Van Halen left SoCal's backyard concert scene and headed to Hollywood, where the action was. Once there, they secured a residency at Gazzarri's, a Sunset Strip hotspot.

On May 9, 1976, Van Halen played the Golden West Ballroom with UFO, a band with rising guitar hero Michael Schenker in its lineup. This was Van Halen's first all-original performance—previous shows had a mixture of covers and originals—and it was electrifying. At the end of their set, Van Halen was called back to the stage by the crowd's roar to do an encore, for which they pulled out a cover of the Kiss classic "Rock and Roll All Nite."

The moment, so early in the band's rapid rise to fame, almost ended tragically. Late in the evening, when Eddie went to use the restroom, a drug dealer gave him something that Eddie thought was cocaine. It was actually PCP, and it left Eddie collapsed and convulsing on the floor. He made it to the ER and went home OK, but he was told that had he arrived any later, he would have been history. It wouldn't be Eddie's last brush with death along the road to superstardom.

It was the late 1970s, disco was about to crash and Van Halen soon became L.A.'s hottest band. They were fixtures at such iconic West Hollywood venues as Whisky a Go Go and The Starwood. It was at The Starwood that Kiss bass player and entrepreneur Gene Simmons first heard Van Halen play. He was so impressed that he offered to sign the band to his production company, produce its demo and shop it to the major labels. Van Halen jumped at the offer and Simmons flew the band to New York to record at the iconic Electric Lady Studios. (The recordings are an internet search away from anyone's ears under the "Zero" demos title.) The demos, however, received no interest from any labels, and Simmons released the band from their deal. With no hard feelings, Eddie remained friends with Simmons for the rest of his life.

One of the attendees at Van Halen's February 2, 1977, performance at The Starwood in West Hollywood was Ted Templeman, who is pictured wearing white sneakers in the below photo with The Doobie Brothers. An established hit-maker, Templeman was so blown away by the band's performance that he returned the following night with Warner Brothers president Mo Ostin.

The next significant figure to step forward to help Van Halen break out was Marshall Berle—nephew of Uncle Miltie himself, comedian and TV pioneer Milton Berle. Marshall Berle became the band's manager and set destiny in motion by convincing producer Ted Templeman to attend a Van Halen show at The Starwood on February 2, 1977.

Templeman was an established hit-maker, having produced The Doobie Brothers, Carly Simon and a band called Montrose that featured an up-and-coming singer named Sammy Hagar. When Templeman heard Van Halen at The Starwood, he was blown away. He came back to the club the following night to hear them again, this time bringing Warner Brothers president Mo Ostin along for the ride.

It was a rainy night with practically no one in the audience, but Van Halen played with unstoppable energy, as if they were at Woodstock. With that magical performance, Van Halen was offered a deal afterward in the dressing room. This set the stage for one of the pivotal moments in rock history.

A little more than a year later, on February 10, 1978, Van Halen's self-titled debut album was released and the guitar world was turned upside down. Opening with the sounds of car horns followed by a staggered band entrance—first Michael Anthony's thumping away on a low E string (tuned to Eb) for a measure, followed by Alex Van Halen's hi-hat and then, two beats later,

"FOR THE FIRST ALBUM, IT TOOK US JUST A WEEK TO DO THE MUSIC.

The band let loose after their September 13, 1979, show at Tokyo's Nippon Budokan, which was the seventh and final performance on the Japanese leg that spanned 11 days of the band's World Vacation Tour. The show's 17-song setlist opened with "Light Up the Sky" and concluded with "Atomic Punk" as the encore.

VAN HALEN

**BY THE NUMBERS**

**11**

studio albums to reach the *Billboard* Top 6

Eddie's strumming of the strings behind the nut for a harp-like effect—the album kicks into full gear with "Runnin' With the Devil." Years later, it was named by VH1 as the ninth-greatest hard rock song.

For guitarists, however, "Eruption," the track that immediately followed "Runnin' With the Devil," was what Van Halen was all about. Jaws dropped when they heard "Eruption's" tremolo-picked classical melodies that alluded to Etude no. 2 from violinist Rodolphe Kreutzer's 42 études ou caprices, vicious blues runs, whammy-bar divebombs and supersonic tapped arpeggios. "Eruption" was the world's introduction to Eddie's signature two-handed tapping technique, and while Eddie might not have been the first guitarist to ever tap, he undoubtedly was the person who brought the technique into the mainstream. The tapped arpeggios spawned a generation of clones and later became a cliche used by countless imitators. In short, with the release of "Eruption," the concept of the guitar hero was born again, and Eddie was on the path to cementing his place as the player at the top of the mountain.

*Van Halen* was a tough album to follow, but the band successfully did so. Their early records became the defining sound of the era and shaped the sound of an entire generation of music. *Van Halen II*, the sequel to *Van Halen*, recorded in three weeks time, was released on March 23, 1979. The album consisted mostly of first takes and featured a vast array of songs including "Spanish Fly," a blazing acoustic sequel of sorts to "Eruption," and "Somebody Get Me a Doctor," which had its origins on the 1976 demo the band recorded with Gene Simmons.

Van Halen's third album, *Women and Children First*, released on March 26, 1980, was the first Van Halen album without any covers. It was also the first time Eddie used keyboards on an album, and he faced immediate backlash. Of course, no one cared that Eddie actually started playing piano long before guitar. The hard-rock crowd was generally resistant to change, and the image of the world's biggest guitar god working a set of keys was a trigger not unlike Bob Dylan going electric at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. To keep the boos at bay, Michael Anthony would play all of the keyboard parts during live performances so Eddie didn't have to be seen without a guitar. This anti-keyboard attitude created tension within the band that lasted for years.

Unlike previous releases, where nearly finished songs were brought into a studio recording session, *Fair Warning* was written mostly in the studio. Released on April 29, 1981, the album saw Eddie take a different approach to recording, making more liberal use of overdubs. With so many additional layers to mix, the album took longer to finish than previous releases. Eddie felt some of his best soloing was captured on *Fair Warning*.

*Diver Down*, released on April 14, 1982, had more of a live-band vibe than *Fair Warning*, but trouble was starting to brew. The "Bermuda Triangle" of tension was between Eddie, David Lee Roth and Templeman. The latter two insisted on including five covers on *Diver Down*. Eddie didn't agree and considered it his least favorite album by the band. Critics also weren't big fans.

After almost six straight years of success — a pivotal point for a lot of iconic rock bands — Eddie retreated to 5150, his personal studio, to plan Van Halen's next move.

"I use these things called voltage generators," Eddie told *Classic Rock* magazine in 1978. "What this box does is it enables me to crank up the voltage higher than the amp is supposed to take. I just crank everything all the way up."

STARTING FIVE

# THE FIRST ALBUMS

Released in consecutive years starting in 1978, each of Van Halen's first five albums peaked inside *Billboard*'s Top 20.

## 1 / VAN HALEN

The first single from the band's self-titled debut album was a cover of the Kinks' "You Really Got Me," done in the inimitable Van Halen style with three-part harmonies, pinch harmonic squeals, kill-switch flutters and, of course, some two-handed tapping. *Van Halen* also gave birth to such certifiable Van Halen classics as "Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love," which was written around a simple two-chord figure (Am-G) and was a jab at the simplicity of punk rock guitar riffs.

## 2 / VAN HALEN II

Eddie reprised his tapping ferociousness on *Van Halen II* with an acoustic angle on "Spanish Fly," and he showed off another side of his personality on the 30-second unaccompanied, harmonic-laden, clean guitar intro to "Women in Love." The album also features other greats like "Beautiful Girls," which, because of pressure from Warner Brothers, had to have some of its lyrical content tamed. The album peaked at No. 6 on the U.S. *Billboard* chart.

## 3 / WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST

While guitar fans expected something like a third sequel to "Eruption," *Women and Children First* instead opened with the sound of a flanged Wurlitzer electric piano through an MXR flanger and a Marshall stack on "And the Cradle Will Rock..." The album featured stylistic diversity that was uncommon for a hard rock band. "Could This Be Magic?" was a slide-infused number with no trace of "heaviness" and a female vocalist, Nicolette Larson, on harmony vocals.

## 4 / FAIR WARNING

*Fair Warning* saw the band take a more compositional approach with layers of overdubs added in the studio. With tensions between Eddie, David Lee Roth and producer Ted Templeman having increased, Eddie later stated that "Unchained," one of the album's highlights, was fueled by anger. "Mean Street" was another highlight, and its explosive percussive introduction showed the world yet another surprising dimension of Eddie's virtuosity.

## 5 / DIVER DOWN

With five covers among its 12 tracks, *Diver Down* faced a fair amount of criticism. However, the band's version of Roy Orbison's "(Oh) Pretty Woman," which did not have a guitar solo, proved to be a hit. For fans of guitar heroics, *Diver Down* offered stunning moments of virtuosity with "Cathedral," one of Eddie's favorite cuts on the album, which almost didn't see the light of day with David Lee Roth not wanting any more guitar instrumentals on an album.

CHAPTER 3

# THE INNOVATOR

Eddie used the index finger of his picking hand to literally tap on the fretboard to sound notes. The repeated lightning-fast signature phrases in "Eruption" and "Spanish Fly" immediately stood out as fresh and exciting because they simply couldn't be played—by anyone—using conventional techniques.

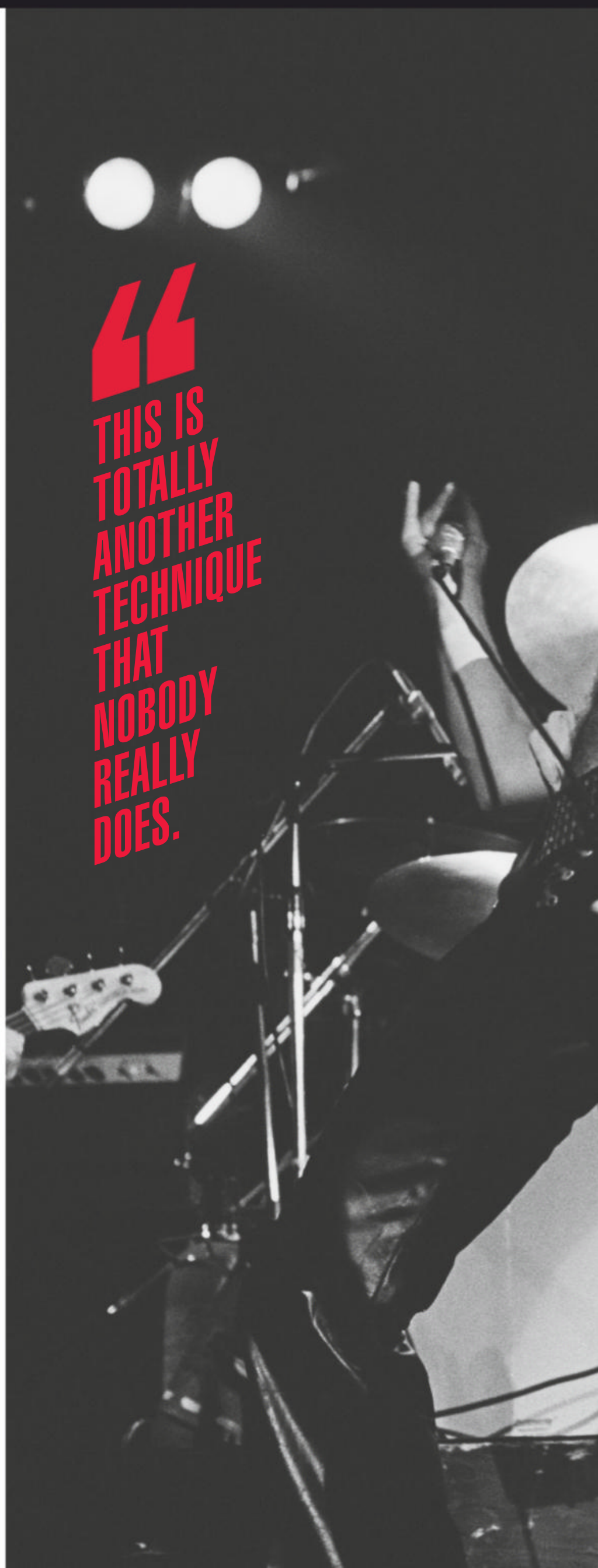
W

hat type of music did Van Halen play? The most common answers are “hard rock” and “heavy metal.” Sounds and songs throughout Van Halen’s discography, however, contradict those labels—or any other label. You will hear flamenco guitar on one album, disco on another, chicken-pickin’ country and Delta blues on others. Yet somehow, when these influences were woven into a Van Halen song, it also always sounded like Van Halen.

This diversity of sound comes from Eddie’s approach to music. He didn’t believe in following conventional formulas. He confidently broke the rules in every situation where doing so was the best course of action for him to achieve his goal. In his ever-evolving musical quest, he became a sonic innovator who continually injected fresh sounds into every album.

For the majority of music fans, the first introduction to Eddie’s ingenuity was on *Van Halen*. This album redefined the art of the guitar solo far beyond the blues-based licks that were the primary sound of rock lead guitar at the time.

The most obvious example of Eddie the innovator is in his famed two-handed tapping technique, in which he used the index finger of his picking hand to literally tap on the fretboard to sound notes. The tapping technique



ludwig

**"I know what I like in electric guitars, but acoustic I'm lost," Eddie told *Classic Rock* magazine in 1978. "I've written songs on electric guitar that would sound real nice on an acoustic, but I've never owned an acoustic guitar. I guess one of these days I'll buy one."**

allowed Eddie to play runs that are impossible to play any other way. The repeated lightning-fast signature phrases in "Eruption" and "Spanish Fly" immediately stood out as fresh and exciting because they simply couldn't be played—by anyone—using conventional techniques. While Eddie might not have been the first guitarist to tap, he certainly was the one that made it a core component of his sound.

"I was just sitting in my room at the pad at home, drinking a beer, and I remembered seeing people stretching one note and hitting the note once," Eddie told *Classic Rock* magazine in 1978. "They popped the finger on there to hit one note. Nobody was really doing more than just one stretch and one note real quick. So I started messing around, and said: 'This is totally another technique that nobody really does.' Which it is."

Most people associate Eddie with playing lead guitar because that's the most extroverted aspect of his style. However, trained musicians have also marveled at Eddie's remarkable work on rhythm guitar. Many of the chord structures he employed in his rhythm guitar figures are shapes adapted from piano. Most hard rock guitarists are not familiar with these types of shapes, which is how Eddie's rhythm parts, like the ones on the intro to "Runnin' with the Devil" or "5150," get that distinct "Van Halen" sheen.

Eddie also made extensive use of harmonics, which are chime-like sounds that the guitar is capable of producing when certain techniques are applied. While harmonics are not obscure, they are often used merely as novelty effects. Eddie, however, made them integral parts of his writing. The intro to *1984*'s "Top Jimmy" is a showcase of harmonics used compositionally as the main theme of a song. At the beginning of "Spanish Fly," Eddie uses harmonics to set the mood, and he uses them again at the end, as part of a graceful closing gesture.

In conjunction with his use of harmonics, Eddie made frequent use of the whammy bar, also known as the vibrato bar. He used it so much, in fact, that it became an unmistakable part of his sound. A prime example of Eddie's most famously recognized whammy-bar usage is in the opening of his solo on Michael Jackson's "Beat It." Just before the speedy runs begin, Eddie uses the whammy bar to get his guitar to growl. Soon after, he sounds some harmonics—played using a variation of the tapping technique—to add a bell-like ring.

Some of Eddie's innovations were generated by effects, which are electronic devices that guitarists use to spice up their sound. Eddie used effects far more liberally than his peers at the time. To get an airplane-like sound on the

VAN HALEN
**BY THE NUMBERS**

**102**

length, in seconds, of Eddie's iconic guitar solo "Eruption"

**Among Eddie's innovations was his use of effects, which are electronic devices that guitarists use to spice up their sound. For example, to get an airplane-like sound on the intros to such songs as "And the Cradle Will Rock..." and "Unchained," Eddie employed an MXR-M117 flanger effect.**

intros to such songs as "And the Cradle Will Rock..." and "Unchained," Eddie whipped out an MXR-M117 flanger effect. The phaser, an effect similar to flanger but with a slightly different flavor (more swooshing, and less like an airplane), was also frequently employed by Eddie. This effect can be heard prominently on the opening muted strums of "Atomic Punk."

Delay, the ubiquitous echo effect that makes every guitarist sound 10 times better than they really are, was another effect that Eddie frequently used. While most guitarists at that time used delay to slightly thicken their sound, Eddie would also use delay almost as an instrument onto itself. "Cathedral" and "Dancing in the Street" from *Diver Down* were, in Eddie's words, "two songs I couldn't have done without an echo." For those songs, he had the delay regenerate his melodies in an unexpected, offbeat rhythm. U2's The Edge would later become associated with this delay trick after using it on "Where the Streets Have No Name."

When anything other than a guitar cranked through a Marshall stack with 4x12 cabinets was unthinkable at the height of the mid-'80s rock era, Eddie insisted on making keyboards a crucial part of Van Halen's sound. He was met with resistance from some fans, but he never wavered in his conviction, which led to a paradigm shift in hard rock and metal. Such bands as Mötley Crüe, which embraced a hard-edged image, softened their stance and, to the shock of many, made the piano the main instrument in their hit, "Home Sweet Home."

So what type of music will Eddie Van Halen be remembered for? The honest answer is that his impact went far beyond flashy guitar licks. A true visionary, he reshaped the course of modern music forever.

"Thank you very much," Frank Zappa said to Eddie in 1981, "for reinventing the electric guitar."

INSPIRATION

# THE PLAYERS EDDIE INFLUENCED

## JOE SATRIANI ^

Forging a career as one of the world's greatest guitar virtuosos, Joe Satriani was determined to use Eddie's tapping style as a springboard for his own version as opposed to simply copying it. "I was thinking, 'What has Eddie not done?'" Satriani told *Music Radar*. "I mean, Eddie is just a genius. He's the Number 1 guitar player of my generation, but I thought, 'I'm not going to step on his toes.'" The songs "Satch Boogie" and "Midnight" from Satriani's 1987 breakthrough album, *Surfing with the Alien*, showcase his take on Eddie's style, as does "Nineteen Eighty" from the more recent *Shapeshifting*, which was released in April 2020.

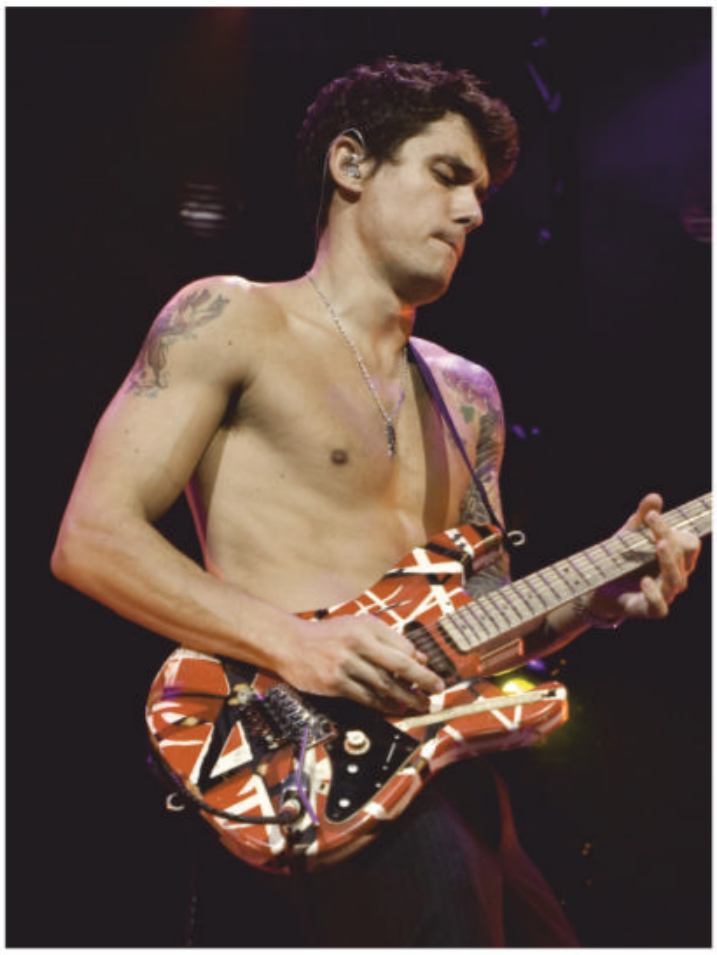
## MIKE McCREADY >

The grunge movement, led by such bands as Nirvana, temporarily killed the guitar solo. But Mike McCready, who was a founding member and guitarist of Pearl Jam, was respectful and well aware of Eddie's innovations. McCready would play "Eruption" on a Fender Strat at Pearl Jam concerts, proving that a grunge rocker could also shred. The band would follow up with a raucous cover of "Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love." "I started playing guitar about a year after *Van Halen* came out," McCready posted after news of Eddie's passing. "It sounded like Eddie was from another planet and the energy from Van Halen was undeniable."

NO
1234567890
GOOD BYE

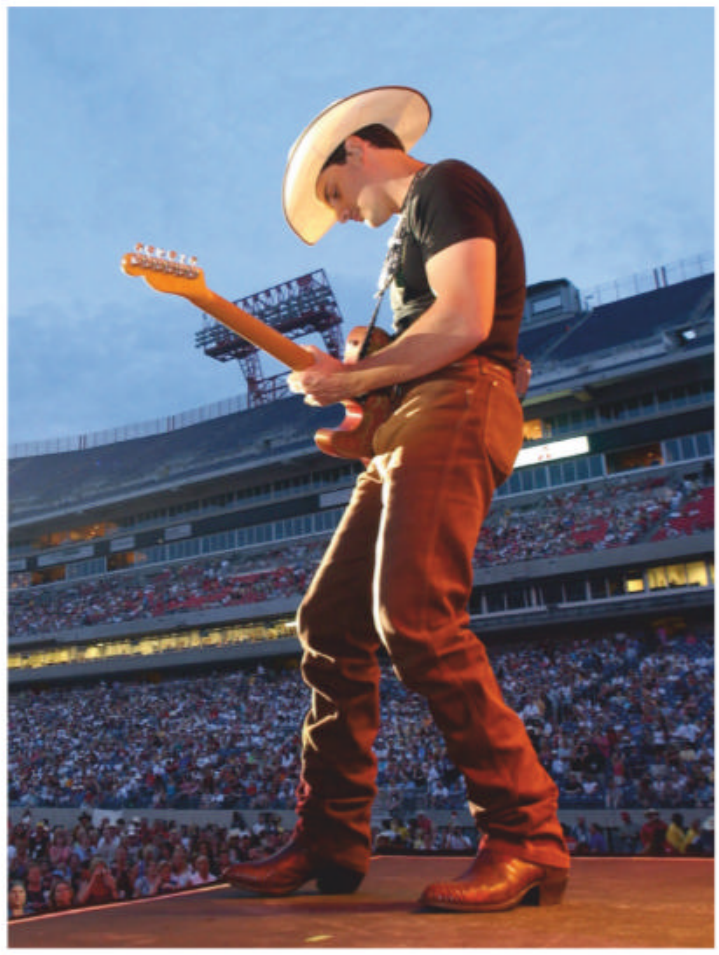
## KIRK HAMMETT <

Van Halen and Metallica frequently crossed paths in the ’80s, sharing the bill on such events as the massive Monsters of Rock festival. Like most metal guitarists of that era, Metallica’s Kirk Hammett found Eddie Van Halen’s influence inescapable. The opening arpeggiated figure of Hammett’s signature solo on “One” is a direct nod to Eddie’s signature tapping technique. “He had a whole muting technique that was based around chords and muting selective strings,” Hammett told *The New York Times.* “This very subtle thing was amazing to me. And I started muting chords and muting riffs. It became a thing that I still do to this day to make riffs heavier or more percussive. That was one thing that Eddie Van Halen just handed to me right away.”



## JOHN MAYER ^

When he’s not busy dating Hollywood starlets, pop singer–songwriter John Mayer is a studied guitarist who cut his teeth on the music of Van Halen. After making it big, a shirtless Mayer would sport a red guitar similar to the one Eddie made famous and perform “Panama” in concerts, introducing the music of Van Halen to the next generation. “Eddie Van Halen was a guitar superhero,” Mayer posted after Eddie’s death. “Learning to play the guitar taught me so many things, but still absolutely nothing about how to play like Eddie Van Halen. And for that reason, I never stopped watching him in adolescent awe and wonder, and I promise you I never will.”



## BRAD PAISLEY ^

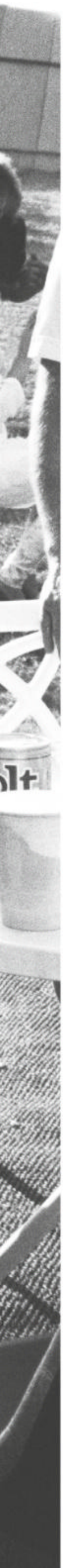
Brad Paisley has won three Grammy awards and sold over 11 million albums, but what many people don’t know is that the country music star plays a mean guitar. He grew up in the ’80s, and Eddie was a huge part of his musical diet. In concert, Paisley routinely whips out a cover of Van Halen’s “Hot for Teacher” to leave no doubts about his playing ability. “I loved everything about the fire and style he brought to the guitar,” Paisley wrote in his Instagram tribute. “I studied him, heck everybody did, we all wanted to play just like him. But no one did it quite like him. Thank you Eddie for being a pioneer. It’s unimaginable what the guitar would be without you.”

CHAPTER 4

# TAMING THE BEAST

Eddie and "One Day at a Time" star Valerie Bertinelli spent a lot of their time in the 1980s trying to get away from the paparazzi. They're pictured here at the Los Angeles premiere of the film *Brainstorm* on September 29, 1983, at the Pacific Theatres Cinerama Dome.

STELLA ARTOIS



Valerie often joined Eddie on tour, including for the 1984 Monsters of Rock festival that featured AC/DC, Mötley Crüe and Van Halen among its eight-band lineup. Here, they're backstage at Donington Park in England on August 18, which was the first of seven shows that spanned three weeks and five European countries.

In 1980, Eddie Van Halen was 25 years old, one of the hottest young stars in the world, and already considered the most famous guitarist of his generation. His namesake band was just as incendiary and his life was, literally, sex, drugs, and rock and roll.

And then came Valerie Bertinelli.

Just 20 years old, Valerie was already well known (and well loved) for playing Barbara Cooper—the smart, wise-cracking kid sister on the hit CBS family sitcom "One Day at a Time." Having played the role since she was 15, Bertinelli was considered an innocent girl, just like Barbara.

In real life, Valerie Bertinelli was more of a rebel. And as a popular young TV starlet, she knew where the hottest parties were happening and that she could march straight in and have the velvet curtains parted for her.

That's exactly why Valerie's brothers, huge Van Halen fans, asked her to join them for the band's concert at Hirsch Memorial Arena in Shreveport, La., on August 28, 1980, during the Invasion Tour. Valerie's parents lived in Shreveport, Valerie was in town for a visit, and the Bertinelli boys figured that with their famous sister by their side, they would have a much better chance at getting backstage to meet the band.

It was a good plan. And all it took to convince Valerie was to show her a picture of Eddie Van Halen. "I took a look at the 8-track cassette that was in the back of my Corvette," she told Oprah Winfrey in 2008. "I saw a picture of Ed, and I went, 'Oh yeah, I'll be going. He's a cutie.'"

When the concert was over, Valerie and her brothers were invited backstage. Noel Monk, the band's manager at the time, welcomed the famous guest and was there to witness history.

**"The moment they laid eyes on each other, it was like, 'Aw, man, forget it. There was a lot of pressure on him by the band not to marry her, but I think they were meant for each other," Van Halen producer Ted Templeman said of Eddie and Valerie, pictured here at the National Association of Music Merchants Show on June 19, 1983, at Chicago's McCormick Place.**

"After Edward dried off and changed his clothes, I introduced him to Valerie," Monk wrote in his memoir *Runnin' with the Devil: A Backstage Pass to the Wild Times, Loud Rock, and the Down and Dirty Truth Behind the Making of Van Halen*. "It was kind of cute to see them together—they were both clearly nervous and somewhat reticent. This struck me as a sign of good chemistry."

If a Hollywood producer ever wanted to make a rom-com about a guitar hero falling for America's sweetheart, there was no need to look any further for the perfect meet-cute.

Valerie brought the band bags of M&Ms. Eddie asked what she thought of *Women and Children First*, Van Halen's latest album. "Yeah, I love it," Valerie said. "I had no idea there was all this other great music out there. I was always so closed off to anyone except Elton John."

The two continued to talk until Van Halen's road manager told Eddie that it was time to go back to the hotel to rest for a few hours before catching the bus to the next city. Eddie smoothly invited Valerie to join him at the hotel, and on that lovely, warm evening they spent time sitting around the pool, getting to know one another. Valerie was surprised to hear that Eddie still lived at home with his parents. Smitten, she resisted the urge to give him a kiss. But when the night ended, she gave him her number.

The phone did not ring the next night. Nor did it ring the night after. But on the third night, as Valerie was playing cards with her brothers, the phone rang after midnight. Eddie was on the line from Beaumont, Texas. He was calling to invite Valerie to a festival he would be playing in Norman, Oklahoma. She accepted the offer and flew in on September 3 to attend the show. Eddie later admitted to her that he was actually nervous playing in front of her.

I SAW A PICTURE OF ED, AND I WENT, 'OH YEAH … HE'S A CUTIE.'
National Association of Music Merchants
EDWARD
Edward Van Halen
Kramer Music Products, Inc.
Neptune, NJ
EXHIBITOR
Kramer

**In his memoir *Runnin' with the Devil: A Backstage Pass to the Wild Times, Loud Rock, and the Down and Dirty Truth Behind the Making of Van Halen*, band manager Noel Monk wrote about the couple's April 11, 1981, wedding: "They made a glorious entrance into the grand ballroom where a crowd of family and friends and an assortment of Hollywood stars burst into applause."**

They went back to Eddie's hotel room after the show, and in Valerie's book, *Losing It*, she recalled, "The more Ed laughed, the harder I fell for him." She was intent on sleeping with Eddie that night but, to her surprise, he had gotten a separate room for her. He revealed that although he felt the same toward her, he wanted to get to know her better first.

From that point on, Valerie accompanied Eddie on the road as much as she was able. After a show in Phoenix on September 15, they went back to the hotel. Walking hand in hand across the hall to the sound of an indoor waterfall, they made their way upstairs. Still, with two adjacent rooms booked, they first went into their respective rooms. When Valerie later entered Eddie's room, she saw him in a chair tearing up as he looked at her. He told her that he had just won a guitar magazine award for Best Rock Guitarist for the fourth time but had been verbally abused by David Lee Roth, who often wanted more than his share of the spotlight. Valerie consoled Eddie, and with tears running down his face, he whispered, "I love you." She responded, "Oh, god, I love you too," and they consummated their relationship that evening.

In November of that year, they moved in together. Valerie had brought up marriage in casual conversation, and they spent time looking at rings. One night, as they prepared to go to bed, Eddie got down on one knee and, holding out one of the rings Valerie liked, proposed to her.

They married on April 11, 1981, at St. Paul's the Apostle Church in Westwood, California. They stayed together for more than 20 years before separating in 2001 and divorcing in 2007, but it appeared as if they never truly fell out of love. "Forty years ago my life changed forever when I met you," Valerie posted after Eddie's death. "I will see you in our next life my love."

VAN HALEN

## BY THE NUMBERS

# 5150

Van Halen's first album to hit Number 1 on the *Billboard* Top 200

FAMILY TIES

# FATHER AND SON

On March 16, 1991, Valerie and Eddie welcomed a son: Wolfgang William Van Halen. While in the womb, Eddie would serenade him with a piece that had not yet been recorded but was performed as part of his live solo feature. The song would later be titled "316" in reference to Wolfgang's birthday. It was finally recorded on *For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge*, which was released on June 18, 1991, just over three months after Wolfgang's birth.

Wolfie learned how to play drums at 9 and, later, Eddie taught him how to play guitar. As a 13-year-old in 2004, Wolfgang joined Eddie on stage to play "316" together with his dad, and two years later he replaced Michael Anthony as Van Halen's bassist. Eddie considered the moments he shared onstage with his son among the happiest in his life.

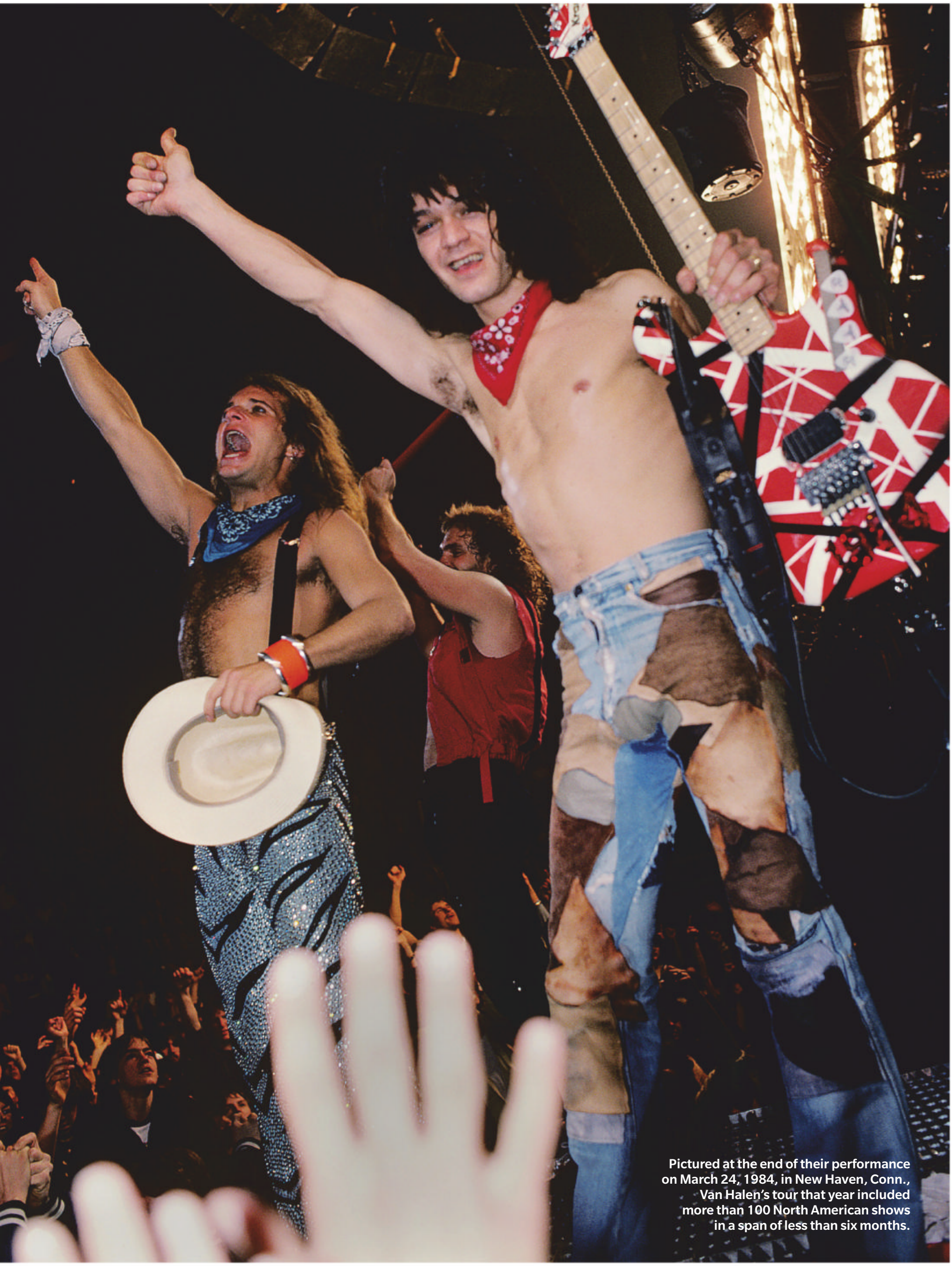
"He was the best father I could ever ask for," Wolfgang posted in an announcement of his dad's passing. "Every moment I've shared with him on and off stage was a gift. My heart is broken and I don't think I'll ever fully recover from this loss. I love you so much, Pop."

"HE WAS THE BEST FATHER I COULD EVER ASK FOR. EVERY MOMENT I'VE SHARED WITH HIM ON AND OFF STAGE WAS A GIFT.

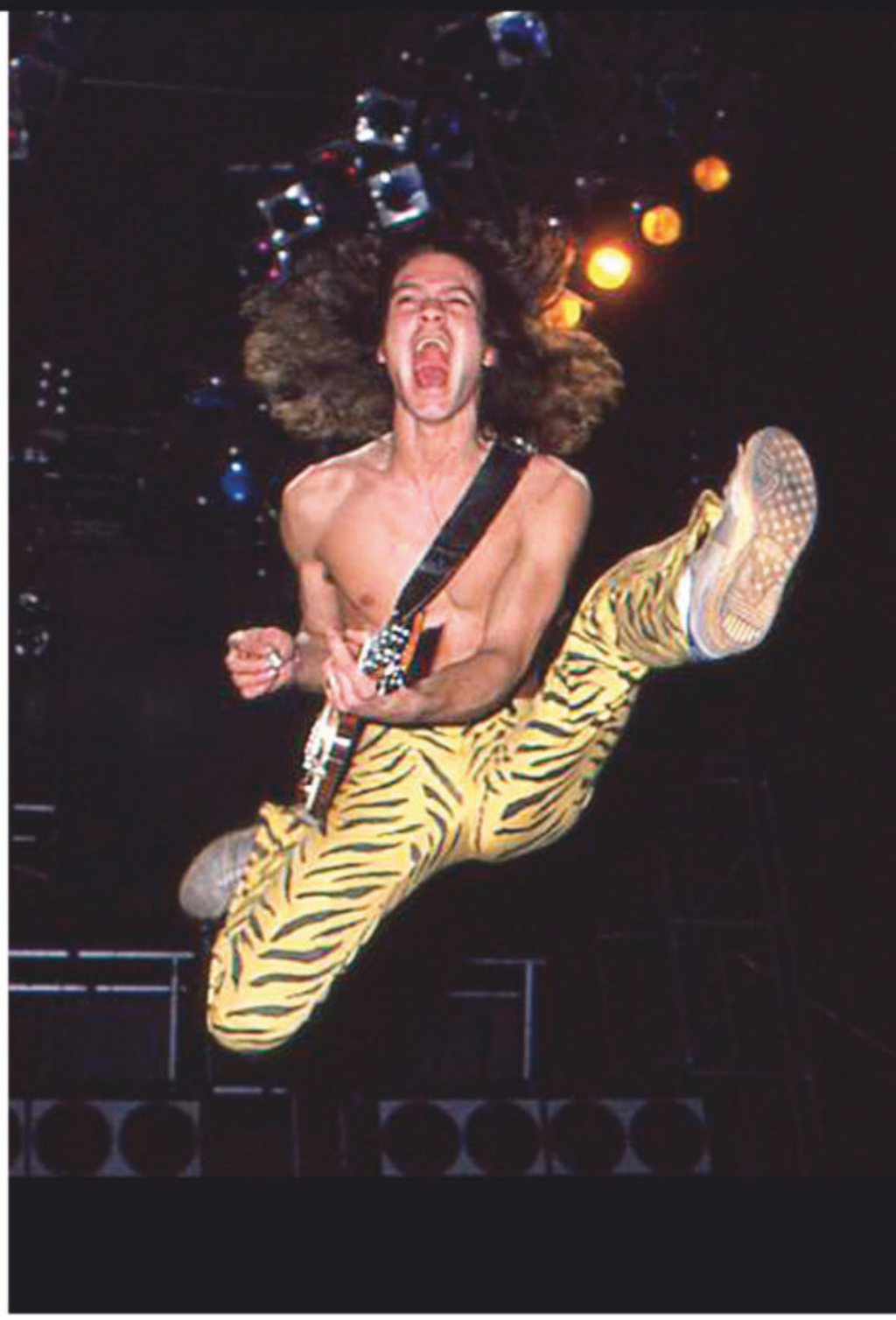
LUDWIG
VAN HALEN

CHAPTER 5

# 1984



Pictured at the end of their performance on March 24, 1984, in New Haven, Conn., Van Halen's tour that year included more than 100 North American shows in a span of less than six months.



Ask an English professor to tell you about 1984, and you'll likely get a synopsis of George Orwell's dystopian novel. But anyone else old enough to remember that glorious moment in pop-culture history will tell you about a time, a place and an album that glittered in neon glory.

Van Halen's magnum opus was the album *1984*, which sold more than 10 million copies and brought the band massive success. It would also end up marking the end of David Lee Roth's initial stint with the band.

The members of Van Halen were huge rock stars. They knew it and they played the part. In their riders they had very specific clauses to see whether concert promoters read the contract in detail. In addition to mandates that "water and coffee must be kept hot continuously with electric hot plates, urns or other suitable devices," under the "Munchies" category was a line item for M&Ms with a side note written in all capital letters: "WARNING: ABSOLUTELY NO BROWN ONES."

Although he was already the world's premier guitar hero, Eddie started to rekindle his love affair with the piano via keyboards and synthesizers.

By the time *1984* was being made, however, Eddie and Roth flat out hated each other because of a combination of artistic differences, clash of egos, and drug and alcohol abuse. Tensions had started brewing years earlier, during the making of *Fair Warning*, when Eddie would sneak back into the studio at 4 a.m. with engineer Donn Landee to re-record all of the solos and overdubs. Things only got worse with the recording of *Diver Down*, which immediately followed. While Eddie was unhappy that five of the album's 12 tracks were covers, Roth believed that if you chose the right songs, you effectively increased your odds of having more hits.

In the meantime, Eddie had secretly started the process of building his studio, named 5150 after the California law code for the criminally insane, which would be constructed on a racquetball court on the Coldwater Canyon property where he had his home. "In a way, *1984* is phase one of Donn and Ed," he told *Guitar World* (July, 1995). The pair worked tirelessly, away from producer Ted Templeman and the rest of the band. They refused to compromise on their vision, and because 5150 afforded them the luxury of time, they were able to do things they wouldn't have done had they been nervously watching the clock. "We almost took control, to a point, because it was done here in our studio, and we knew what we wanted."

Like any true artist, Eddie constantly evolved. Although he was already the world's premier guitar hero, he had rekindled his love affair with the piano via the keyboards and synthesizers in the studio. To the displeasure of Roth and Templeman, Eddie wanted keyboards to play a heavy role in Van Halen's music going forward. Eddie went so far as to boldly open *1984* with "1984," an instrumental that consisted simply of washy, ethereal synth sounds that lasted for 69 seconds. "Jump" immediately followed.

Kramer

Eddie, shown here at Van Halen's March 30,1984, show at New York City's Madison Square Garden, had written the main riff for "Jump" three years before its eventual release as the second track on *1984*. The song ended up being the band's biggest hit, reaching the top of the *Billboard* singles chart.

As a lead single, "Jump" was Van Halen's keyboard-driven mega-hit. The main riff had been written in 1981, but it was consistently rejected by the band. Then, in 1983, Templeman finally sold Roth on the song, after they rode around in the Hollywood Hills, with Roth listening to it from the backseat of a 1951 Mercury Lowrider. Roth agreed this time around and the song moved forward. When it was released, its synth-heavy sound was harshly criticized by Eddie's hardcore guitar fans. The song, however, ended up being Van Halen's biggest hit, reaching the top of the *Billboard* singles chart.

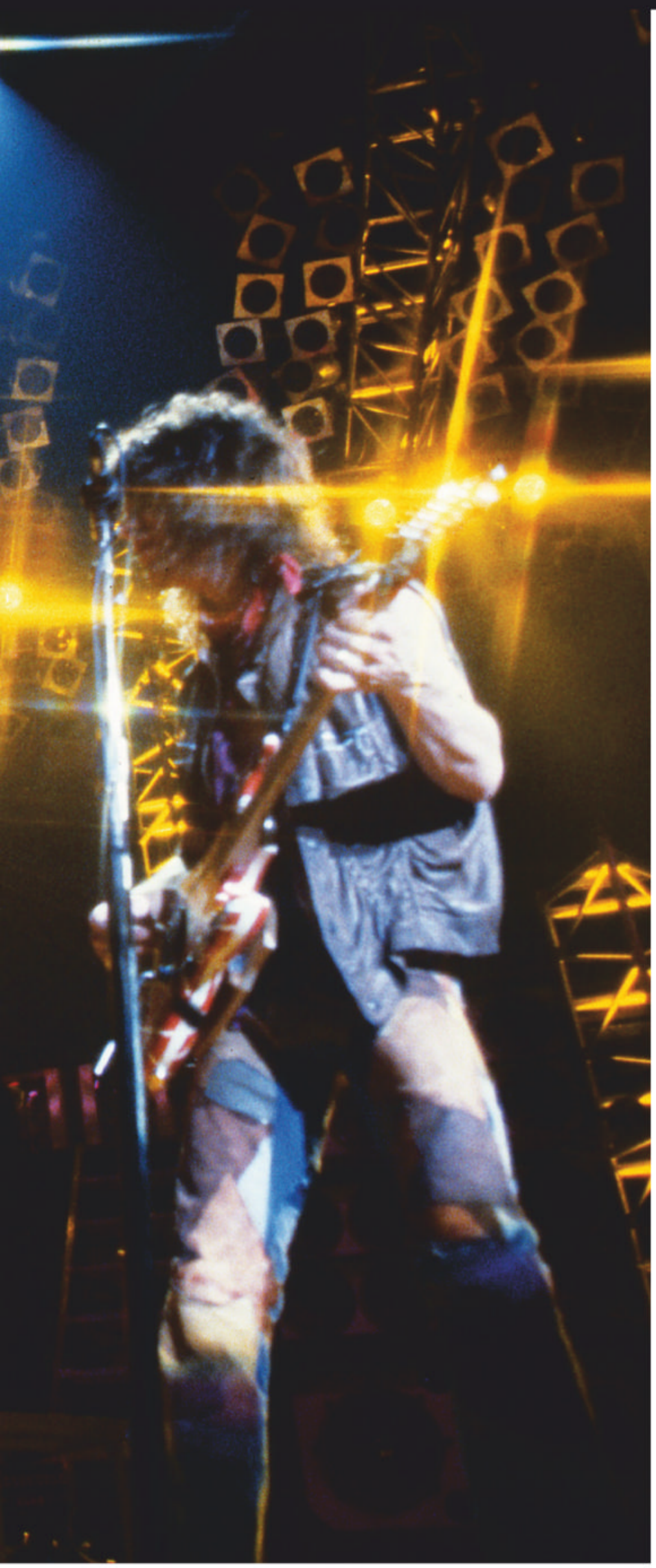
While Eddie and Landee believed strongly in "I'll Wait," another synthesizer-driven song, no one else did. Roth and Templeman "didn't want to touch the song with a 10-foot pole." The initial tracks were laid down by Eddie and Landee, but they were met with apathy when they presented the song to the rest of the band. The success of "I'll Wait," which reached Number 13 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart, showed that Eddie's instincts were right.

The power-rock vibe of the song "Panama" offered the band's guitar-centric fans what they wanted. Its in-your-face opening riff more than made up for the song's lack of a blazing solo. The music video, meanwhile, was an MTV classic. In one scene, Eddie blows smoke rings while seated in a white tuxedo at a Yamaha grand piano. The piano belonged to famed composer Marvin Hamlisch, and the segment was filmed at his Malibu beach house, which Eddie had rented for the 1983 spring and summer seasons. In search for new sounds, Eddie had violated the piano by sticking everything from ping pong balls to batteries inside it and strumming them across the piano strings. Although Eddie had the piano restored prior to vacating the rental, the video clued Hamlisch in to the destruction that went on in his home.

Like "Panama," "Hot For Teacher" was another of *1984*'s successful hard-rocking songs, starting with a tapped, hyper-speed boogie riff. The song's video created controversy with its scene of a teacher stripping down to her skivvies. Senator Paula Hawkins of Florida played the video when she was first to testify on Capitol Hill in September 1985 on behalf of Parents Music Resource Center, whose members were seeking recording industry compliance in warning parents about music that might be considered inappropriate for children.

"This issue is too hot to cool down," Hawkins testified. The question before the committee, she said, was how far should society go "to keep young children from being exposed to words and images which may run counter to their parents' values and beliefs."

**Van Halen had reached the pinnacle of pop superstardom, but along with success came enormous pressure and interpersonal tension. By the time 1984 ended, the good times would never be quite as good again.**



VAN HALEN

## BY THE NUMBERS

# 0

dollars Eddie made for the guitar solo he played on Michael Jackson's "Beat It"

Van Halen's videos made them MTV darlings, and to capitalize on this, MTV conducted an appropriately named "Lost Weekend" contest in which fans entered to win a getaway with the band. In the promo commercial, Roth, alongside two women, says, "How about a little joyride in my limo?" With the lure for thousands of daydreaming teens around the country being too much to resist, MTV received more than a million postcards. Kurt Jefferis, then 20 years old, of Phoenixville, Penn., sent in 13 postcards and was announced as the winner by MTV VJ Martha Quinn. Jefferis was allowed to bring a guest and decided to leave his girlfriend at home, instead opting to bring Tom Winnick, his best friend. They were flown on a Lear Jet to Detroit to join the band at its show (of which some footage was used in the "Panama" video). There, Jeffries was called to join the band onstage where they smashed a huge cake in his face, doused him with champagne and serenaded him with "Happy Trails." The menu backstage included lobsters, cocaine and strippers.

Van Halen, the party band turned MTV superstars, had reached the pinnacle of pop superstardom. But along with success came enormous pressure and interpersonal tension. By the time the year ended, the good times would never be quite as good again, and a big part of the problem was Eddie's increasing addiction to alcohol and drugs.

SUPERSTAR CROSSOVER

# THE STORY OF "BEAT IT"

**In a 2012 CNN interview, Eddie recalled a time nearly 20 years earlier that he heard "Beat It" playing at a Tower Records. "The solo comes on, and I hear these kids in front of me going, 'Listen to this guy trying to sound like Eddie Van Halen.' I tapped him on the shoulder and said, 'That *is* me!'"**

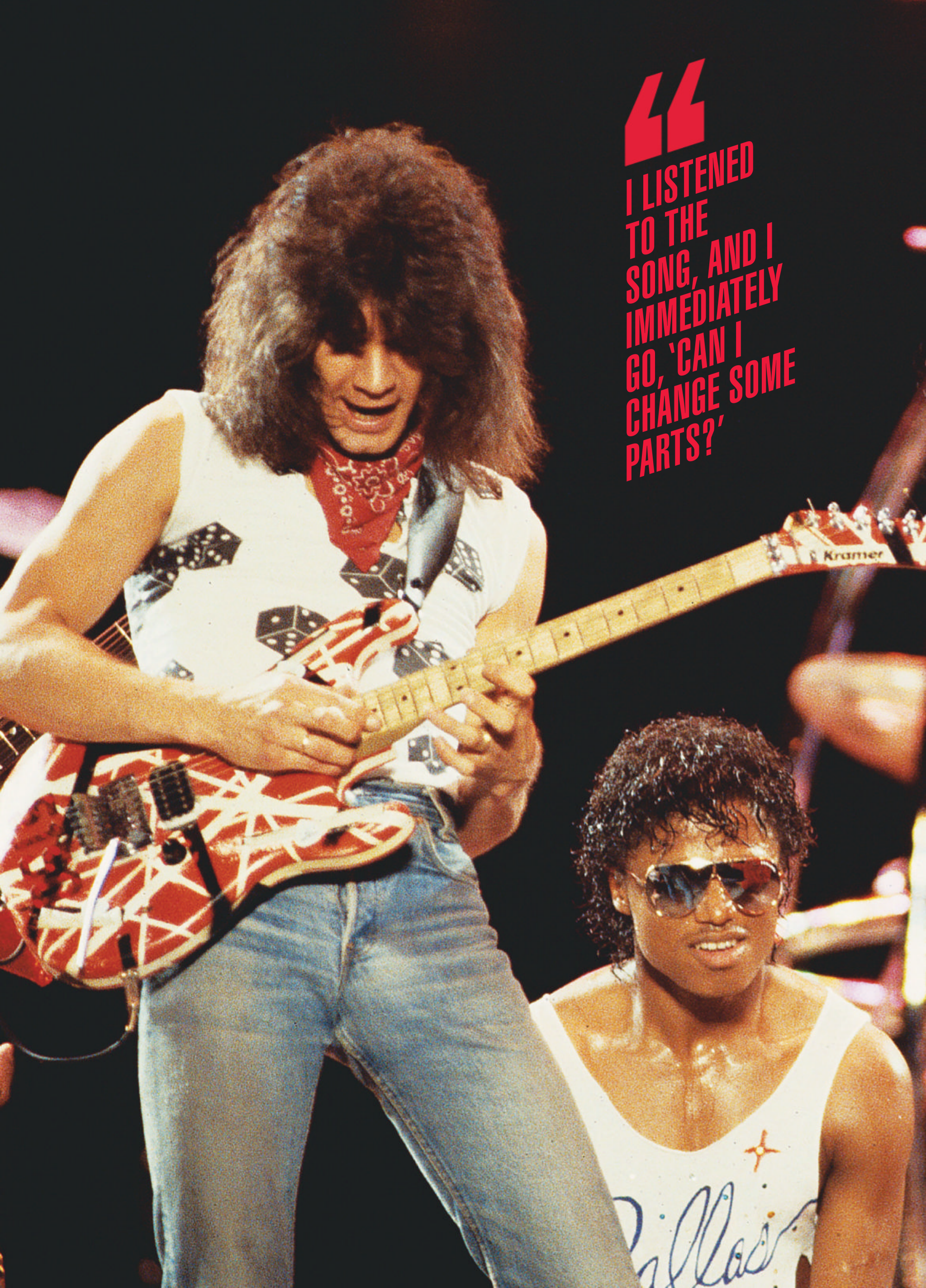
During the recording of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* in 1982, producer Quincy Jones reached out to Eddie to see if he wanted to play a solo on "Beat It." It took several attempts before Eddie believed that Jones, a music icon that he admired, was actually on the phone. Eddie respected Jones so much that after he was convinced that this was a legitimate request, he offered to record the solo for free, despite the insistence of Van Halen manager Noel Monk that he receive some sort of compensation.

"At the very end, Quincy wrote me a letter thanking me," Eddie told CNN in 2012. "It was signed, 'The F-ing Blah Blah Blah,' which I still have. It's very funny."

During this period, the band frowned upon outside projects. But Roth was away in the Amazon, Alex was in Canada and Anthony was at Disneyland, so Eddie was able to sneak the session in. Jones offered no specific direction, instead telling Eddie to do "whatever you want to do." Eddie ended up first rearranging the middle section of the song—though that might not have been what Jones had in mind when he offered Eddie artistic freedom—before he'd record his famous solo. Jackson liked Eddie's fast and furious style of playing so, with that in mind, Eddie made sure to add in flashy licks.

He recorded two takes in 20 minutes and opted to let them pick the best one. As Eddie was wrapping up the second solo, Jackson walked in, and Eddie confessed that he moved things around in the song. Expecting a testy reaction, Eddie was surprised when Jackson said, "Wow, thank you so much for having the passion to not just come in and blaze a solo, but to actually care about the song, and make it better."

"Beat It" hit Number 1 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart on April 30, 1983, and *Thriller* would go on to become the best-selling album of all time.




“I LISTENED TO THE SONG, AND I IMMEDIATELY GO, ‘CAN I CHANGE SOME PARTS?’

CHAPTER 6

# FRANKENSTRAT

To build his "perfect" guitar, Eddie bought a guitar body and a neck, and put the instrument together himself. With a chisel and hammer, he routed out the guitar so he could fit in a humbucking pickup, which he cannibalized from one of his other guitars.

**Eddie coined the term "brown sound" to describe the noise his guitar made—the reference was to a majestic and warm sound reminiscent of his brother Alex's snare drum. "It's basically a tone, a feeling that I'm always working at," Eddie told *Guitar World* (July, 1985). "Everything is involved in that, and I've been working with it since I've been playing. It comes from the person."**

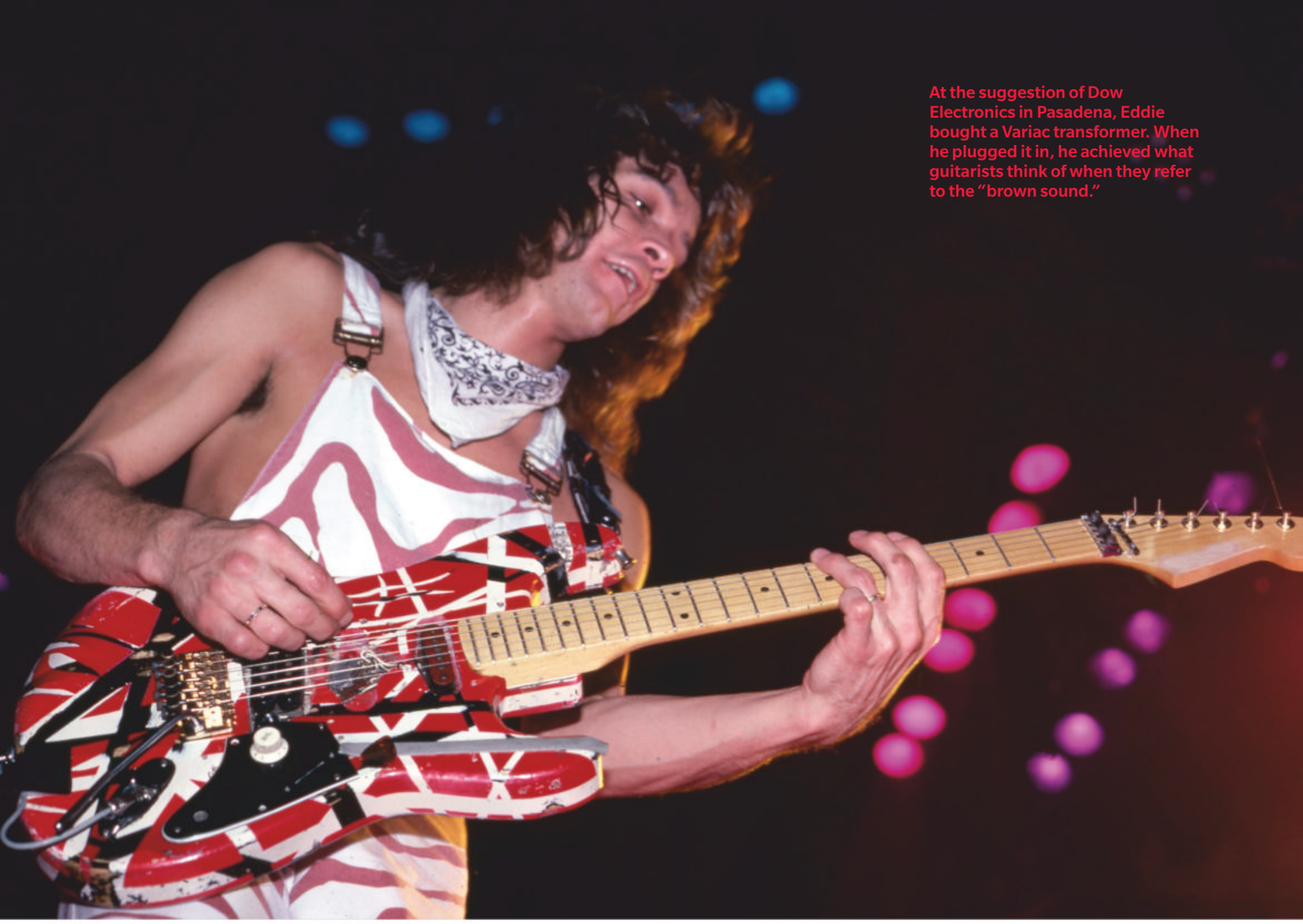
The hallowed halls of New York City's Metropolitan Museum have housed the creations of such artists as van Gogh, Rembrandt and Matisse. The Met also once displayed Frankenstrat, the striped guitar that Eddie Van Halen made from a hodgepodge of parts. The inclusion was earned, because it's not an exaggeration to say that Frankenstrat is a masterpiece.

Eddie Van Halen is celebrated for his revolutionary guitar playing. Less often discussed, yet equally relevant, are his breakthrough innovations in regards to guitar gear. His creations arose from a mix of necessity and experimentation, and both elements led to the birth of Frankenstrat.

In the '70s, the most popular rock guitars were the Fender Stratocaster and the Gibson Les Paul. Each of those guitars had unique characteristics, but Eddie envisioned something of a hybrid. The Strat, which was popularized by Eddie's childhood hero, Eric Clapton, had a whammy bar, which Eddie loved. The Stratocaster was designed with three single-coil pickups (pickups are magnetic components that literally "pick up" the sound in electric guitars), however, which tend to sound thin and are prone to humming somewhat noisily. Eddie preferred the sound of a Les Paul's larger humbucking pickup, which sounded beefier than the Stratocaster's single-coil pickups, and also canceled any hum (hence the term "humbucking").

So Eddie decided to build his "perfect" guitar. To do so, he bought a guitar body and a neck, and he put the instrument together himself. With a chisel and hammer, he routed out the guitar so he could fit in a humbucking

TONE



At the suggestion of Dow Electronics in Pasadena, Eddie bought a Variac transformer. When he plugged it in, he achieved what guitarists think of when they refer to the "brown sound."

pickup, which he cannibalized from one of his other guitars. Eddie didn't know how to install the humbucking pickup, but through trial and error, he was eventually able to get it to work. He also started dipping his pickups in paraffin wax to stop them from squealing and generating feedback.

Eddie coined the term "brown sound" to describe the noise his guitar made—the reference was to a majestic and warm sound reminiscent of his brother Alex's snare drum. "It's basically a tone, a feeling that I'm always working at," Eddie told *Guitar World* (July, 1985). "Everything is involved in that, and I've been working with it since I've been playing. It comes from the person."

In the guitar community, the "brown sound" term loosely refers to Eddie's distorted amp sounds on Van Halen's early albums. Guitar amps tend to sound much better when they are cranked. Of course, that's most often not practical to do because it would be much too loud. To find a way to get his amp working at its full potential while operating at a lower, more tolerable volume level, Eddie first tried plugging his amp into a light dimmer to lower its voltage. Not only did this fail to work, but it took out the power in his house.

He then went to Dow Electronics in Pasadena and asked if they had any industrial variable transformers similar to a light dimmer. They suggested he pick up a Variac transformer, which is an AC power supply that provides adjustable AC voltage. When he got home and plugged it in, he finally achieved what guitarists think of when they refer to the "brown sound." (This is actually a dangerous procedure that requires playing with electricity: As the old saying goes, please don't try this at home.) Musical instrument manufacturers picked up on the term and spawned a cottage industry of "brown sound"-based amps and pedals.

Eddie was born a tinkerer. It was inherited from his father, saxophonist and clarinetist Jan, who MacGyvered his way out of unexpected scenarios throughout his life. When Jan's bottom teeth started falling out, he built a homemade dental bridge out of Teflon. He would insert that into his mouth when it was time for him to play.

Another night, back in Pasadena, Jan came home from a gig at 3:00 a.m. to find a U-Haul trailer that was filled

VAN HALEN

## BY THE NUMBERS

# $100,000+

estimated value of Eddie's Frankenstrat, which was donated to the Hard Rock Cafe in 1995

up with cinder blocks up on a car jack, and blocking the alley way to the family garage. Jan already had a few drinks in him and was pretty worked up, so he tried to lift the trailer. When he did, the jack fell and ended up cutting off one of his fingers. Determined to continue playing clarinet, Jan adapted a saxophone valve cover to allow him to seal the clarinet's hole and play, even with a missing digit.

"Watching him do that kind of stuff instilled a curiosity in me," Eddie told *Popular Mechanics* (June, 2015). "If something doesn't do what you want it to, there's always a way to fix it."

Even if something wasn't broken, Eddie still looked to "fix" or improve upon it. He shaved down his fretboards to make them flatter so notes wouldn't cut out on bends. After Eddie's flashy guitar solos became popular, guitar makers started using flat radius fretboards on their instruments.

It's entirely fair to say that Eddie Van Halen will not only be remembered for the music that he played, but also for the gear that he created, altered or influenced. In that way, Eddie's sound is likely to remain alive forever.

**The schematic of US Patent US4656917A, which was filed by Eddie on April 14, 1987, shows a line drawing of a figure that looks a lot like Eddie shredding a solo.**

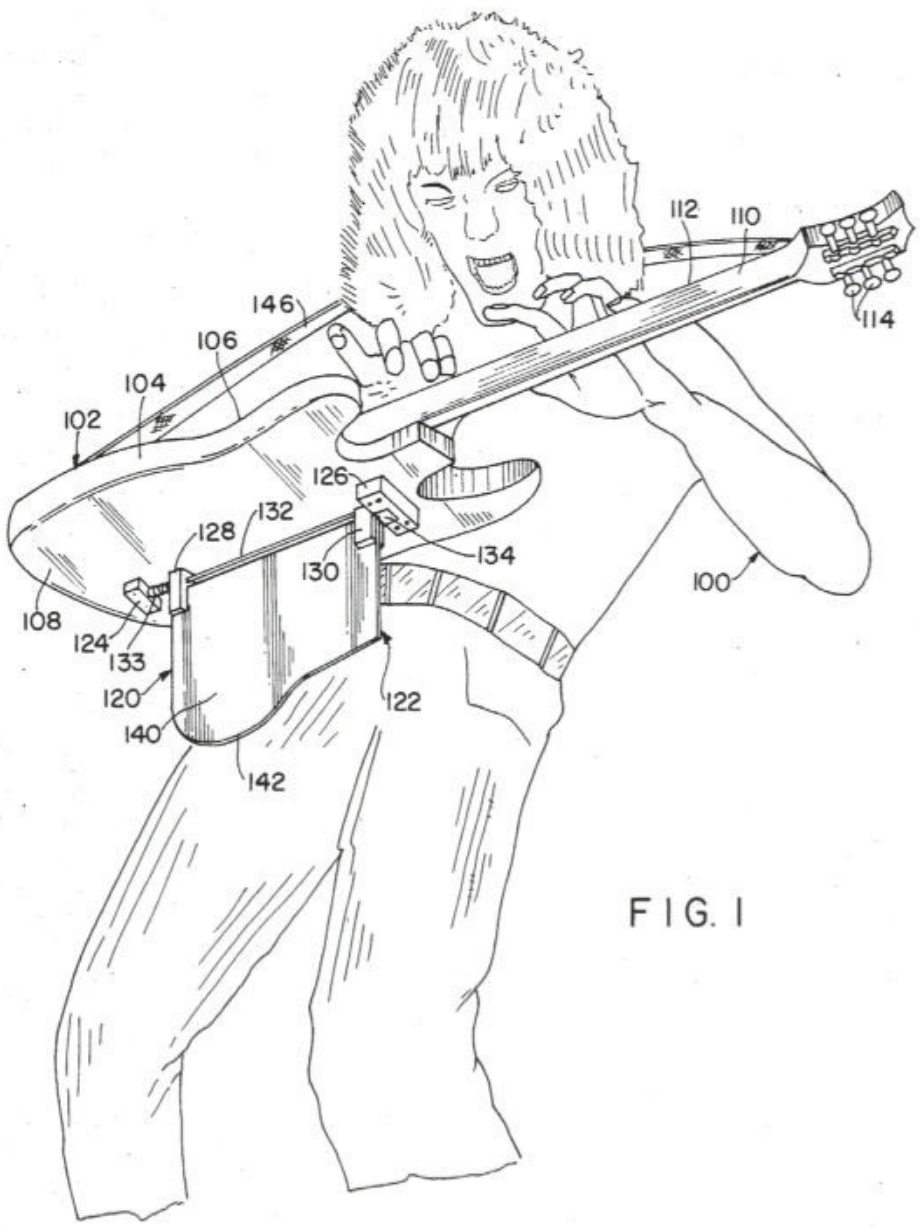



FIG. 1

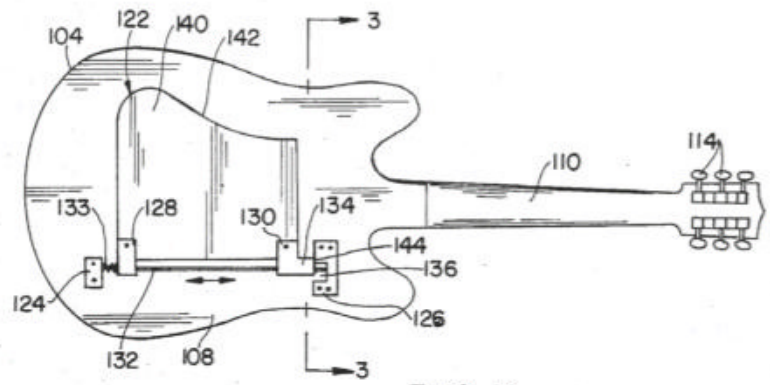



FIG. 2

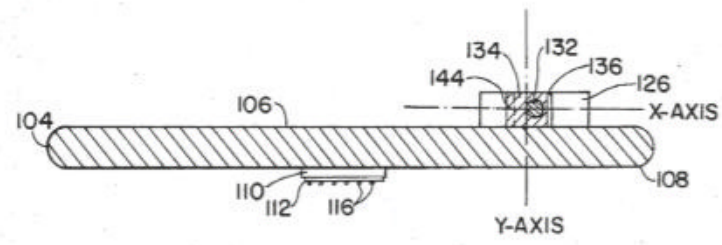



FIG. 3

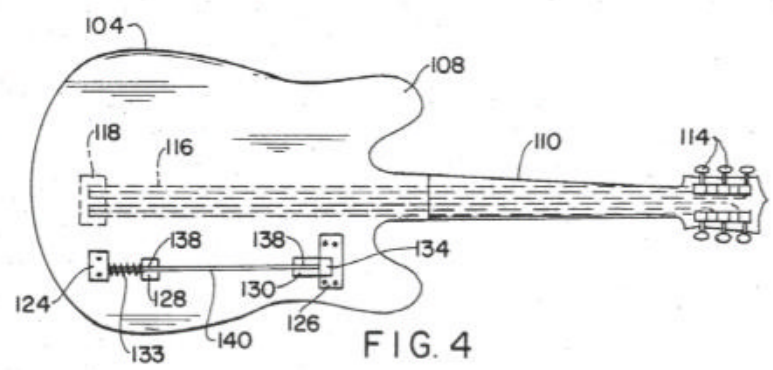



FIG. 4

INNOVATION

# EDDIE'S AWESOME PATENT

Eddie Van Halen's mind was always racing to find the next thing, and throughout the decades, he came up with many inventions and patents. His patented D-Tuna (designed by an entrepreneur named Adam Reiver) allowed the guitar's low E string to be retuned back and forth from D to E instantaneously, and is standard equipment on his signature guitars. Another intriguing patent was for a device that allowed the guitar to be supported by the player's leg, in effect, positioning the guitar perpendicularly, like a lap steel guitar. Since both hands are not needed to hold anything, they are free to play the guitar, almost like a piano.

The drawings for patents in the United States are public domain. While most drawings are boring schematics, US Patent US4656917A is very different. That's the one filed by Eddie on April 14, 1987, showing a line drawing of a figure that looks like Eddie shredding a solo.

To correctly represent his ever-evolving vision, Eddie launched the EVH line of guitars and amps in 2007, in conjunction with Fender Musical Instruments Corporation (FMIC), and released a limited run of 300 Frankenstein Replica Guitars. These instruments captured every fine detail of Eddie's original Frankenstrat down to the 1971 quarter that he once stuck under the tremolo bridge.

CHAPTER 7

# RISE AND FALL

Shown here on June 3, 1984, in Denver, David Lee Roth was at odds with Eddie over the band's direction. Not helping matters was Eddie's increasing addiction to alcohol and drugs.

Van Halen replaced David Lee Roth with Sammy Hagar, shown here (far right) as the 25-year-old singer of the band Montrose in 1973.

hether or not fans realized it, one of the reasons Van Halen concerts always connected with audiences was because the band's members looked as if they were having fun. Behind the grins, stage jumps and kegger kicks, however, was long-brewing tension. A few months after the 1984 Tour wrapped, everything erupted.

The fuse was lit when David Lee Roth surprisingly released a solo album, *Crazy from the Heat,* on January 28, 1985. Roth then let the band know that he was in talks with CBS Studios to do a *Crazy from the Heat* movie. Roth asked Eddie if he would score the soundtrack. Eddie declined. Several weeks later, Roth quit Van Halen.

Eddie, meanwhile, had wanted to quit the band as far back as *Fair Warning*. "If I had quit, then I wouldn't have spent an extra four years putting up with [Roth's] attitude," Eddie told *Guitar World* (September 1986). "I mean, hey, the guy's creative, OK? But he's a lousy human."

With Roth now out of the picture, Van Halen faced the daunting task of finding a replacement. Who could possibly fill Diamond Dave's larger-than-life boots and buttless-chaps? Eddie asked Patty Smyth of Scandal, but she declined because she was pregnant. Then one July day, Eddie's Lamborghini broke down. It was an unfortunate event that turned out to be fortuitous.

Sammy Hagar, solo artist and former Montrose frontman, also had his car—a Ferrari BB 512i that was used in his "I Can't Drive 55" video—at the same shop, at the same time. At the suggestion of mechanic Claudio Zampoli, Eddie called Hagar from the shop and tried to set up a meeting. Hagar told him, "Eddie, that sounds great. I'd love to play with you, but I'm just burned out. I've been touring solo for 10 years. I'm thinking about taking a year off."

Eddie proposed just getting together to see what happens, and when they met up, the chemistry was immediately apparent. They played together on "Summer Nights" and "Good Enough," among many other songs, and the jam session went on for 12 hours straight. The next morning, as soon as he woke up, Hagar decided he was in.

The new Van Halen (or "Van Hagar" as they were often referred to) was born, and the new lineup went on to record four albums: *5150, OU812, For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge* and *Balance*. Eventually, Eddie and Sammy started to feud, too. In 1996, Hagar was replaced with former Extreme frontman Gary Cherone. This

“EDDIE WOULD SAY, ‘CAN YOU HIT THIS NOTE?’ I’D HIT IT AND EVERYBODY WOULD GO, ‘WOW!’

The Billboard Music Awards' opening live performance at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas on May 17, 2015, was David Lee Roth, Alex Van Halen, Wolfgang Van Halen and Eddie performing the band's hit "Panama" from *1984*.

third incarnation of Van Halen recorded *Van Halen III* but achieved little success before everyone went their separate ways.

At one point in 2002, Hagar and Roth actually toured together and co-headlined under the "Song for Song, the Heavyweight Champs of Rock and Roll" bill. It was an amusing 21-date run that was a treat for fans of both "Van Hagar" and the Roth edition of Van Halen. In 2004, Van Halen briefly reunited with Hagar and released a compilation CD that featured three new songs. But after a successful tour, Hagar left the band again.

Many diehard Van Halen fans had longed for the day that David Lee Roth would return. There had been teases and several false starts throughout the years, but nothing happened until January 2007, a few weeks after Van Halen was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. It was announced then that, after more than two decades, David Lee Roth would once again be touring with Van Halen.

With the Roth Army coming out in full force, this reunion tour, which also saw Wolfgang taking over bass duties from Michael Anthony, proved to be Van Halen's highest-grossing ever. In 2012, the reunited band recorded *A Different Kind of Truth*, their first studio album with Roth since *1984*. The album was a huge success, debuting at Number 2 on the *Billboard* 200 and charting well around the world. The accompanying arena tour sold out virtually every show. In 2015, the band again toured with Roth, in support of that year's live album, *Tokyo Dome Live in Concert*.

VAN HALEN

## BY THE NUMBERS

# 2007

year Van Halen was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame

Together on what would turn out to be their final tour together, David Lee Roth and Eddie are pictured here on July 16, 2015, at the Shoreline Amphitheatre in Mountain View, Calif. Pictured below is Eddie in 2006 with Janie Liszewski, a former stuntwoman who appeared in such high-profile movies as *Spider Man 2* and *The Wedding Planner* (as a double for Jennifer Lopez). Eddie married Liszewski in 2009.

Van Halen had planned one final farewell tour for 2019, this time with original bassist Michael Anthony making a return. Metallica and the Foo Fighters were also slated to take part. Eddie was not well, however, and the plans were canceled. He had been plagued with health problems for a long time, but he managed to plow his way through even while in serious pain. Soon after having hip-replacement surgery, Eddie was treated for tongue cancer in 2000, resulting in surgery which removed a third of his tongue. He was declared cancer-free two years later, yet he continued to smoke despite Valerie Bertinelli begging him to quit. Eddie later developed throat cancer, and he would suffer from the disease for 10 years.

Eddie's lifelong battle with substance abuse compounded his health issues. Since he was a kid, he depended on various substances to calm down. "I remember my dad got me drinking and smoking when I was 12," he told *Guitar World* (February 1995). "I was nervous, so he said to me, 'Here. Have a shot of vodka.' Boom—I wasn't nervous anymore."

While the drugs and alcohol helped take the edge off, they also caused Eddie to behave erratically and have violent mood swings. His addiction was so severe that he had a personal drug dealer who flew to meet him on tours. Various stints at rehab temporarily helped Eddie, but he was never able to win his battle. His addictions ultimately destroyed his marriage: A divorce petition that Bertinelli filed in Los Angeles Superior Court in December 2005 cited irreconcilable differences. (According to the petition, they had separated on October 15, 2001.)

Eddie married Janie Liszewski, a former TV and movie stuntwoman, in 2009. Apparently settled and happy, Eddie appeared for concerts looking relatively fit and playing fine. But off stage, the final years of Eddie Van Halen's life included numerous surgeries and hospital stays to try to fix a long list of damages, most of which Eddie had inflicted on himself over a lifetime of abuse.

Shown here at their photo shoot for the album cover of *5150* are (from left) Eddie, bassist Michael Anthony, lead singer Sammy Hagar and drummer Alex Van Halen.

STRONG FINISH

# THE FINAL STUDIO ALBUMS

Each of Van Halen's four albums with Sammy Hagar reached Number 1.

## 1 / 5150

Van Halen's first album with Sammy Hagar, Eddie would've likely done *5150* with just producer–engineer Donn Landee had Warner Brothers not prevented Eddie from taking full control. Foreigner guitarist Mick Jones helped with the album's production. With such ballads as "Why Can't This Be Love?," "Love Walks In" and "Dreams," *5150* reflected a new direction in Van Halen's sound. The album was a massive success, reaching Number 1 on the *Billboard* 200 chart.

## 3 / FOR UNLAWFUL CARNAL KNOWLEDGE

Van Halen's third studio release with Hagar was their third consecutive album to reach Number 1. The origin of the hit "Right Now" traces back to the Roth era, when an instrumental version of it was used in *The Wild Life*, a movie that Eddie scored. *For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge* featured one of Eddie's most touching recorded moments: "316," the instrumental dedicated to his beloved son Wolfgang.

## 5 / VAN HALEN III

The band's lone album with Gary Cherone was its least successful effort. The opening acoustic-guitar-meets-piano instrumental "Neworld," and solo sitar instrumental "Primary" are unlike anything Van Halen has ever recorded both texturally and in their absence of flashiness. Another unique track is the final cut "How Many Say I," which featured Eddie on lead vocals for the first time, singing against just the sound of piano, with Cherone on background vocals.

## 2 / OU812

By the time OU812 was released, Van Halen was well versed in writing radio-friendly, pop ballad hits. Eddie and Hagar lived next to each other in Malibu, and "Finish What Ya Started" was written after all of the album's songs were already complete. Eddie called for Hagar to come over at 2 a.m., and they wound up writing "Finish What ya Started" on the porch. "When It's Love," the album's second single, reached Number 1 on the *Billboard* mainstream rock chart.

## 4 / BALANCE

Balance was the last studio album Van Halen recorded with Hagar, and it too reached Number 1. Eddie recorded most of the album sober and had a hard time. "There's like this wall, and when I drink, my inhibitions are lower so I just wing stuff without getting embarrassed or nervous," Eddie told *Guitar World* (February 1995). "But I have to get past that because drinking's no good." Producer Bruce Fairbairn (Bon Jovi, Aerosmith) worked with the band on the album.

## 6 / A DIFFERENT KIND OF TRUTH

Seven of the 13 tracks on 2012's *A Different Kind of Truth* are musically re-worked and lyrically re-written songs that had been demoed more than 30 years earlier but never officially released. Debuting at Number 2 on the *Billboard* 200, Van Halen's final studio album featured an appropriate lineup for a grand finale with David Lee Roth on vocals and Wolfgang on bass. For many, hearing Roth's voice over Eddie's guitar was a sound for which they'd spent decades patiently waiting.

CHAPTER 8

# THE GREATEST GUITAR PLAYER. EVER.

**"He changed the perception of the electric guitar," Lenny Kravitz told *People* magazine. "He did things with the electric guitar that no one did—he is a pioneer."**

**In the days following Eddie's passing, a makeshift memorial was erected at the site of his hand prints and signature on the Hollywood RockWalk at Guitar Center's flagship store on the Sunset Strip.**

On October 6, 2020, Wolfgang Van Halen shared the sobering news on Instagram: "I can't believe I'm having to write this, but my father, Edward Lodewijk Van Halen, has lost his long and arduous battle with cancer this morning."

The sad news of Eddie Van Halen's death devastated people around the world. Although Eddie's health was rapidly declining in recent years, most were unaware of how dire his condition truly was. After recovering from tongue cancer in 2002, which Eddie believed he got from holding metal picks in his mouth during decades worth of concerts, cancer resurfaced a few years later. Eddie flew to and from Germany in recent years to get radiation treatment for throat cancer. In November 2019, he was hospitalized after a reaction from cancer drugs caused intestinal problems and severe stomach pains. More recently, his cancer had spread to his brain and other organs, and the guitar god eventually succumbed to the disease.

Very soon after word of Eddie's passing became public, musicians, celebrities and everyday people whose lives were touched by Van Halen's music shared their memories of Eddie and offered their condolences to his family.

Eddie and Valerie Bertinelli are pictured here on February 18, 1995, at New York's Hard Rock Cafe, where Eddie was donating his guitar. Although the couple would divorce a little more than 10 years later, they remained close to the very end.

VAN HALEN

## BY THE NUMBERS

**10**

number of multi-platinum Van Halen albums

Although Eddie's marriage to Valerie Bertinelli ended several years ago, the two remained close, and she was by his side when he passed away. "40 years ago my life changed forever when I met you," she posted after he died. "You gave me the one true light in my life, our son, Wolfgang. Through all your challenging treatments ... you kept your gorgeous spirit and that impish grin. I'm so grateful Wolfie and I were able to hold you in your last moments."

Gene Simmons, who tried to get Van Halen a major label deal in the band's early days posted, "Eddie was not only a Guitar God, but a genuinely beautiful soul."

Ozzy Osbourne posted, "His influence on music and especially the guitar has been immeasurable."

Lenny Kravitz told *People* magazine, "He changed the perception of the electric guitar. He did things with the electric guitar that no one did—he is a pioneer."

For music fans, pioneer is the correct word to describe the legacy of Eddie Van Halen, who revolutionized the way the guitar is played. He thought outside the box musically and almost always did things the right way—which was his way. From "Eruption" to "Mean Streets" to "Cathedral," Eddie continually rewrote the guitar playbook. His legacy is that he was The Greatest Guitar Player Ever.

The title is deserved not just because of flashy solos or because he was copied by countless guitarists. His impact went far beyond that. Eddie also played a role in helping to dismantle social and musical barriers in ways most fans never realized.

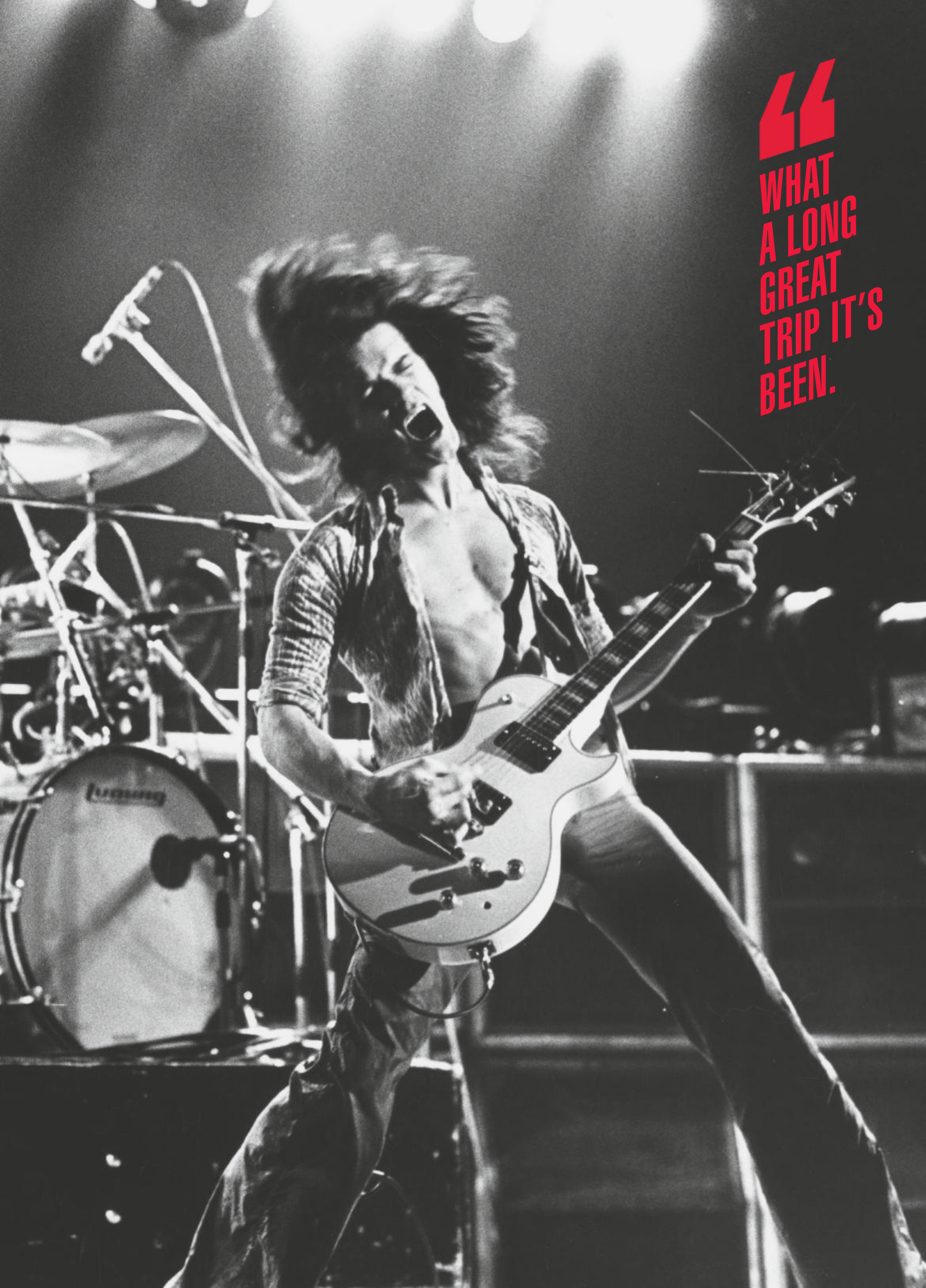
When MTV launched in 1981, the music industry was segregated in terms of both race and genre. The channel mostly played rock and pop music by white artists at the time. Eddie's 1982 contribution to Michael Jackson's "Beat It" triggered a cultural shift that resulted in MTV starting to embrace more racial diversity with its programming. The idea that a hard-rock guitar solo could be mated to a dance-rock track and become the biggest single in the world opened the music industry's mind to what was possible once they looked beyond categories and labels. Eddie Van Halen, the visionary, planted the seeds, and now, four decades later, the music world has become much more vibrant and inclusive because of it.

Earlier this year, Sammy Hagar and Eddie began texting and rekindling their brotherhood, keeping it quiet because they didn't want to start rumors of a "Van Hagar" reunion. The day after Eddie passed, Hagar and Michael Anthony made a tribute video for Eddie and, with a full band, performed "Right Now." Hagar remarked, "A Van Halen song never felt so hard to play and sing in my life."

As the world mourned yet another painful loss in an already painful year, even the usually garrulous David Lee Roth was at a loss for words. The former Van Halen frontman was there from the start—before the band was famous and before Eddie Van Halen was revered as a legend. As he contemplated all that had happened over the years, the good and bad, the crazy and the complicated, all he could think to say in regards to Eddie was, "What a long great trip it's been."

The trip was indeed great, and not just for the band. It was great for all of us who ever had the pleasure of listening to the talent and gifts that Eddie Van Halen was generous enough to share with the world.

As the world mourned yet another painful loss in an already painful year, even the usually garrulous David Lee Roth was at a loss for words. The former Van Halen frontman was there from the start—before the band was famous and before Eddie was revered as a legend.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WHAT
A LONG
GREAT
TRIP IT’S
BEEN.

BEST OF THE BEST

# EDDIE VAN HALEN'S FIVE ESSENTIAL SOLOS

Considered by many to be the greatest guitar solo of all time, "Eruption" started as something Eddie would play in Van Halen's live sets.

## 1 / "ERUPTION" FROM *VAN HALEN*

The track that started it all, "Eruption" introduced the world to Eddie's fiery tapping technique. In 2012, *Guitar World* readers voted it the Greatest Guitar Solo of All Time.

"I remember driving home from a Twisted Sister club gig with [bass player] Mark Mendoza late one night and hearing 'Eruption' on the radio for the first time," Twister Sister frontman Dee Snider posted after Eddie's passing. "Our minds were blown . . . and guitar playing was never the same."

"The story behind 'Eruption' is strange," Eddie told *Guitar World*. "While we were recording the album, I showed up at the studio early one day and started to warm up because I had a gig on the weekend and I wanted to practice my solo-guitar spot. Our producer, Ted Templeman, happened to walk by and he asked, 'What's that? Let's put it on tape!'

"I played it two times for the record, and we kept the one that seemed to flow. Ted liked it, and everyone else agreed that we should throw it on the album. I didn't even play it right—there's a mistake at the top end of it. Whenever I hear it, I always think, 'Man, I could've played it better.'"

## 2 / "SPANISH FLY" FROM *VAN HALEN II*

The sequel to "Eruption" from Van Halen's follow-up album, *Van Halen II*, "Spanish Fly" was played on an acoustic guitar. Showing he didn't need the help of a cranked and distorted amp to play his lightning-fast tapped runs, Eddie proved to any doubters that he was the real deal.

The idea of "Spanish Fly" started when Eddie played an acoustic guitar at a New Year's Eve party at Templeman's house. Templeman wasn't aware that Eddie could shred nearly as easily on acoustic. Once he found out, he asked Eddie to write an acoustic instrumental for *Van Halen II*.

## 3 / "CATHEDRAL" FROM *DIVER DOWN*

Many famed guitar stylists were one-trick ponies—once the novelty wore off, people moved on. Eddie was always in search of new sounds and continually revitalized his approach to the guitar. Though the tapping technique became Eddie's signature move, he didn't just stop there. On "Cathedral," he used a delay effect to have his melodies echo in a syncopated rhythm while simultaneously manipulating his guitar's volume knob on and off. This produced an effect reminiscent of a psychedelic church organ.

## 4 / "BEAT IT" FROM *THRILLER* (MICHAEL JACKSON)

At the time, Van Halen had a policy of not allowing outside projects for members of the band. But when all of the other members were away, Eddie seized the opportunity to record a solo on what turned out to be the best-selling album of all time.

Eddie's solo on "Beat It" was the icing on an already killer song. He crammed just about every "Eruption"-era Eddie-ism—from whammy-bar growls, to tapping flurries, to tremolo picking—into a 30-second wonder of sound.

## 5 / "HOT FOR TEACHER" FROM *1984*

"Hot for Teacher" may be the only radio-friendly song that's ever started with both a drum solo and scorching guitar solo. And those solos were just a teaser for what was to come. A full-throttle boogie with an infectious groove, "Hot for Teacher" is considered by many enthusiasts to be Van Halen's greatest song.

The song's video, while extremely entertaining, also created a great deal of controversy with its risqué scenes. More than three decades later, fans still quote the famous line from Roth, in his role of bus driver during the video's introduction: "Sit down, Waldo."

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# EDDIE VAN HALEN

*“Rock stars come and go. Musicians play until they die.”*

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